KURT BUSCH WINS THE CHASE

THE BCS FOLLIES
SI PLAYS THE COMPUTER GAME

Sports Illustrated

The Pacers' Ron Artest attacks a fan in the stands on Nov. 19 in Detroit

SPORTSRAGE

THE ONUS IS ON THE NBA, BUT FRIDAY'S MELEE SHOULD BE A WATERSHED MOMENT IN AMERICAN SPORTS

BY JACK MCCALLUM

NOVEMBER 29, 2004 www.SI.com | AOL Keyword: Sports Illustrated

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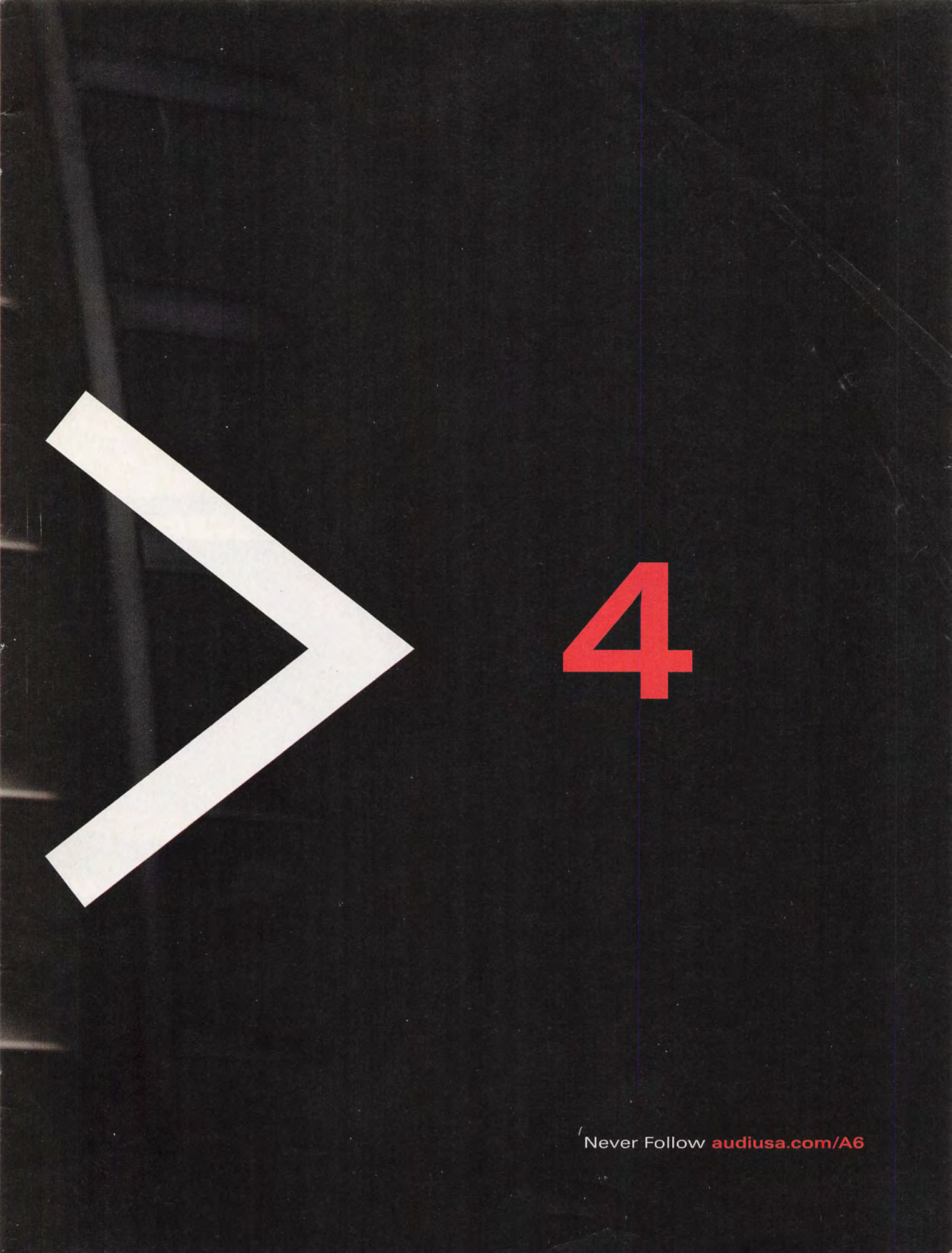
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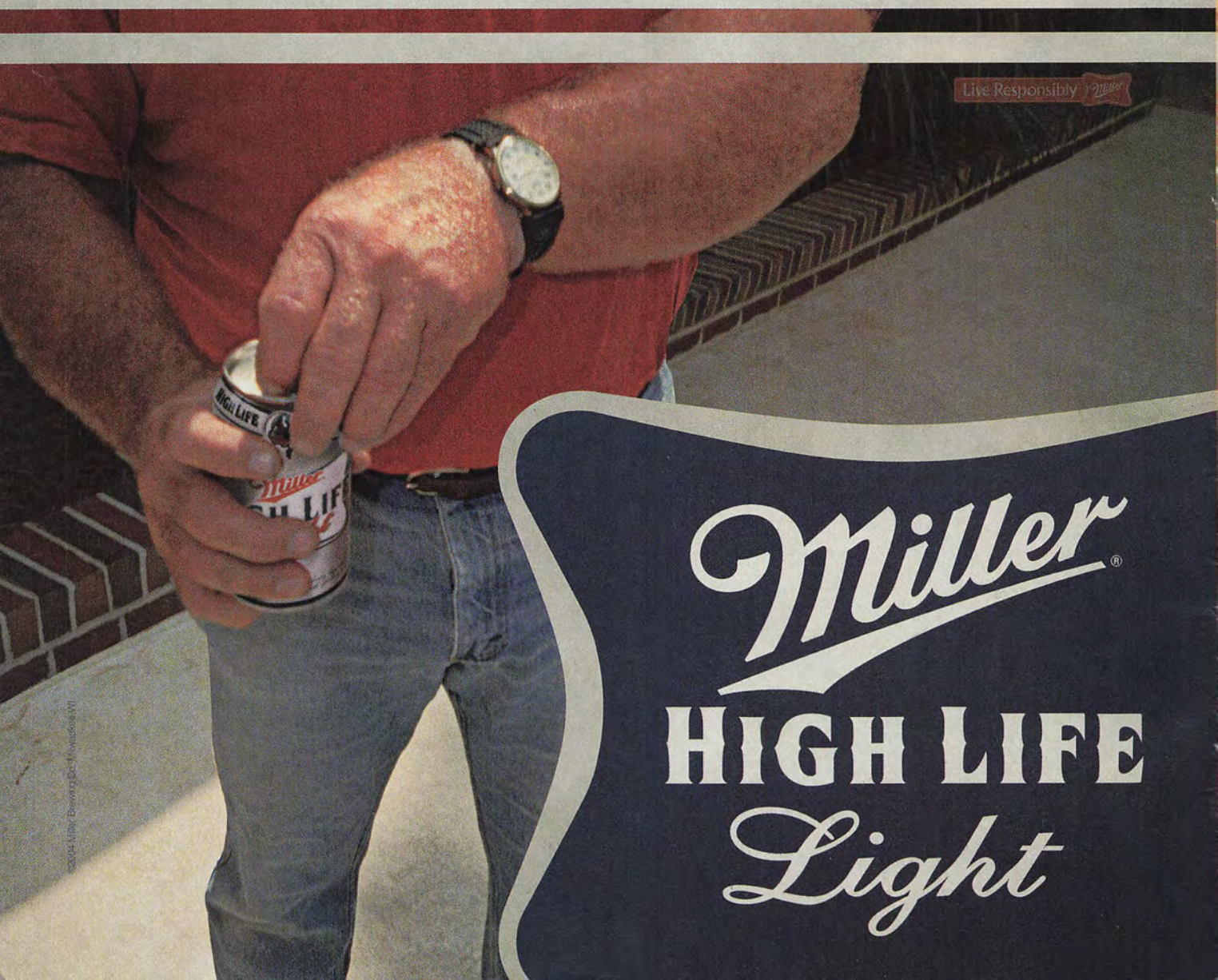

Sports Illustrated
NOVEMBER 29, 2004
VOLUME 101, NO. 21

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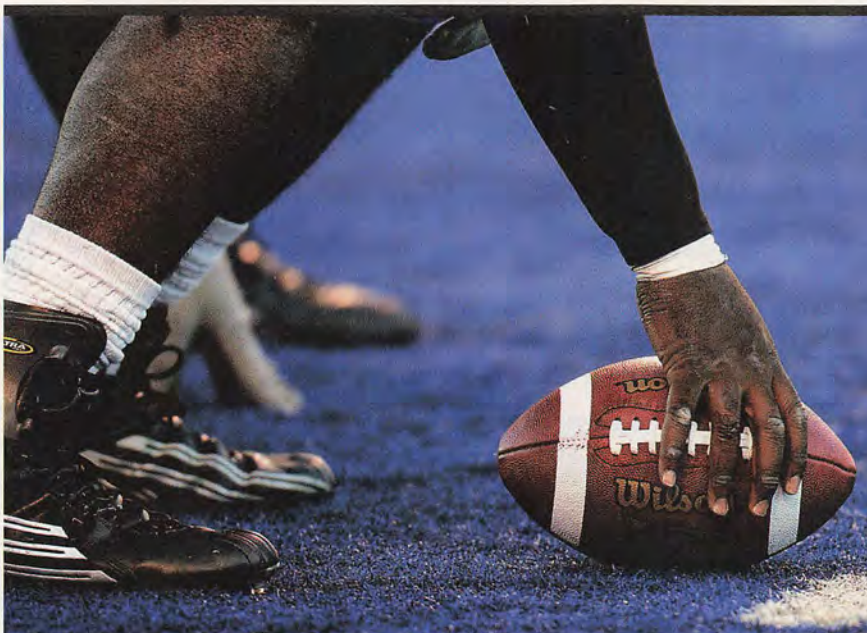

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IMAGE FROM ESPN
COVER FLAP PHOTOS: David Walberg (car); George Tiedemann/GT Images

SI Extra

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JOHN BIEVER; ESPN (INSET)

SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (ISSN 0038-822X) is published weekly, with an extra issue in February and two issues combined in July and at year end, by Time Inc. Principal Office: Time & Life Building, Rockefeller Center, New York, NY 10020-1393. Ann Moore, Chairman, CEO; Richard Atkinson, Executive Vice President. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40110178. Return undeliverable Canada Addresses to: Postal Stn A, PO Box 4322, Toronto, ON, M5W 3G9. GST #122781974RT. U.S. subscription: $81.95 for 55 issues. SUBSCRIBERS: If the postal service alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within two years. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to SPORTS ILLUSTRATED, Post Office Box 30602, Tampa, FL 33630-0602, MAILING LIST: We make a portion of our mailing list available to reputable firms. If you would prefer that we not include your name, please call or write us. ©2004 TIME INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. REPRODUCTION IN WHOLE OR IN PART WITHOUT PERMISSION IS PROHIBITED. SPORTS ILLUSTRATED IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK OF TIME INC.

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Leading Off

DAVID WALBERG

Busch League

Kurt Busch (97) pulls into the pit during the NASCAR Ford 400 at the Homestead-Miami Speedway on Sunday. Busch finished fifth, which gave him the points he needed to win the overall championship (page 60) and earned him a hug from his girlfriend and his mom.

Photograph by Bob Rosato

For daily Web-only Leading Off galleries, go to **si.com/scorecard**.

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GOODYEAR
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PENNZOIL

Leading Off

Big Apple Turnover

Falcons quarterback Michael Vick gets upended by Giants cornerback Will Peterson during Atlanta's 14–10 win in the Meadowlands on Sunday. The game was the first start for New York rookie quarterback Eli Manning (below; page 56).

Photograph by John Iacono

AL TIELEMANS

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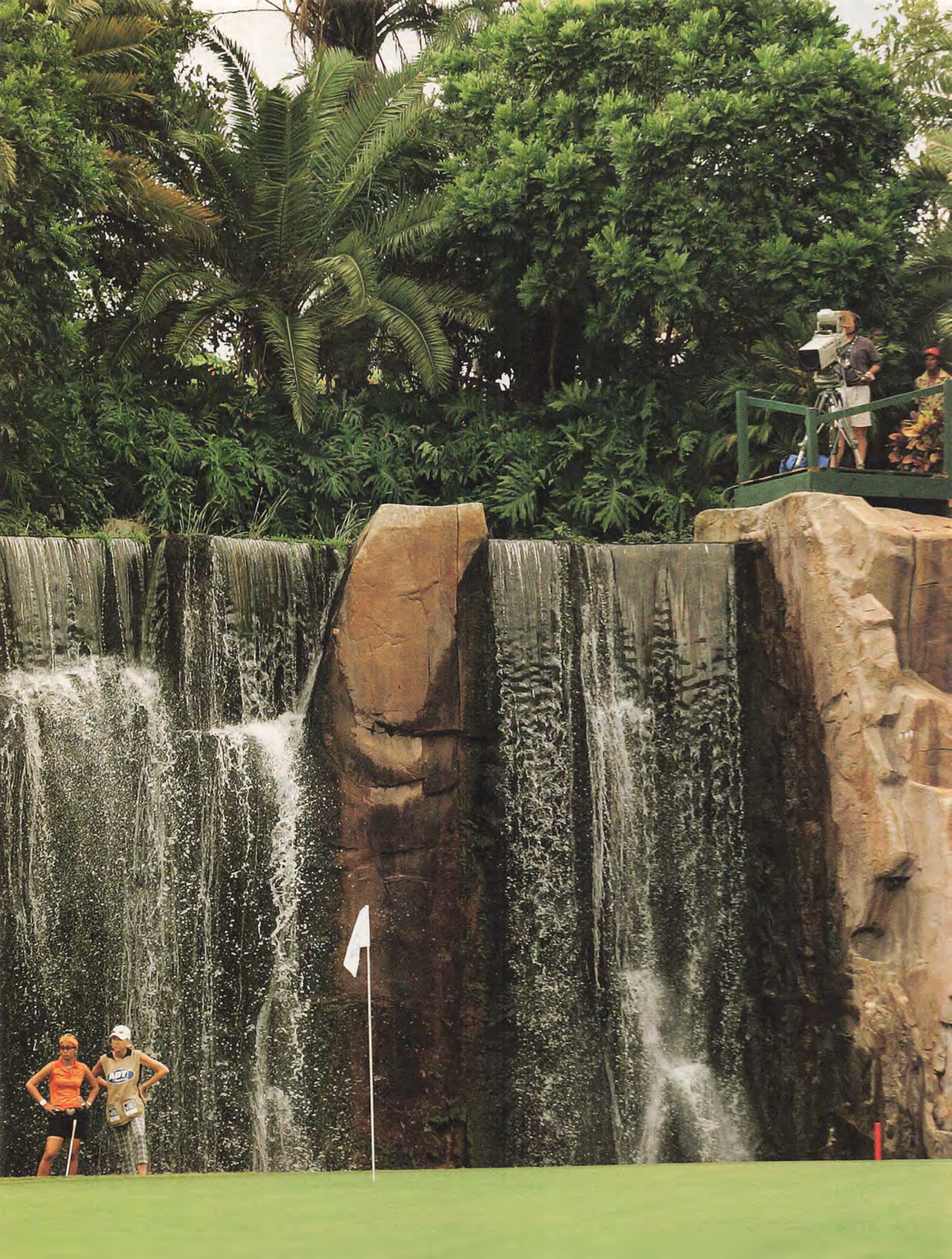
Leading Off

Water Hazard

Annika Sorenstam chips onto the 17th green during the final round of the LPGA ADT Championship in West Palm Beach, Fla., on Sunday. Sorenstam beat Cristie Kerr on the first playoff hole for her eighth win of the season.

Photographs by Darren Carroll



A Long Time Coming

Your cover (Nov. 8) showing goofy grins on the faces of Johnny Damon, David Ortiz, Pedro Martinez and Curt Schilling certainly brought a smile to my face. After all those years when Tom Yawkey refused to integrate his team and, as a result, had one bad season after another, I'll happily take a long-haired Jesus look-alike, a blond guy with a bleeding foot and a few Dominicans any day of the week. Let us remember the 2004 baseball season as the year that a bunch of idiots, as diverse as the occupants of a New York subway car, came together and gave us one of the best rides of our lives.

John D. Kevari, San Bernardino, Calif.

For 86 years those of us in Red Sox Nation have subsisted on "Wait till next year." Finally, 2004 *is* next year! Let us enjoy it for a while. Why is Tom Verducci immediately writing about issues we have to deal with for *next* year (*Now Comes the Hard Part*, Nov. 8)? Long live the 2004 gang!

Jack Walsh, Chesapeake, Va.

Thinking about free-agent signings is too much reality for me. I just fulfilled a long-awaited sports fantasy.

Jim Gilhooly, Nashua, N.H.

As a member of Red Sox Nation, I would like to thank the 2004 Boston Red Sox for taking me on a roller-coaster ride that simply cannot be replicated, and for proving that dreams can in fact come true. Congratulations, you bunch of idiots, it's your time to shine.

John Asimakopoulos, Dracut, Mass.

Wow! At long last the Red Sox have won the World Series! Now all they have to do is put together about 20 more world championships, and they can lay claim to being the second-greatest team in the history of baseball—right behind you-know-who.

Robert Cole, West Palm Beach, Fla.

Boston, stop pretending to be the Little Team That Could and own up to being what you in fact are—a big-market team with a fat wallet. Yankees–Red Sox is not the Evil Empire versus the Jedi, it's more like U.S.A. versus U.S.S.R.: two superpowers that dwarf everybody else.

David Chapus
Rochester, N.Y.

Life sure is great as an ex-lifelong-suffering Red Sox fan.

Kevin Kelleher
Mansfield, Mass.

I'm disappointed that SI chose for This Week's Sign of the Apocalypse an item on deep-sea diving (SCORECARD, Nov. 8). I don't see how it could have been anything other than, "Wednesday, October 27, 2004, the Boston Red Sox won a World Series."

Brandon S. Kelley, Chapel Hill, N.C.

Horse Sense

As a horse racing fan for more than 30 years, I hope and pray honors for achievement in the sport are not too influenced by television ratings—as Tim Layden's nod to Smarty Jones for Horse of the Year suggests (INSIDE HORSE RACING, Nov. 8). Ghostzapper missed the first half of 2004 due to an injury; Smarty Jones missed the last half of '04 so the owners could grab $39 million from syndication fees. Smarty Jones's efforts were limited to racing 3-year-olds; Ghostzapper beat the best of all ages. Maybe I'll try to find somebody that can breed a fast colt with big floppy ears and a curly tail. That would ensure plenty of media coverage and at least give my horse a shot at Horse of the Year honors.

Bill Rauscher, Hanover Park, Ill.

Ads Infinitum

I've read more than a few articles echoing Steve Rushin's column about corporate America taking over, and I agree with all of them (AIR AND SPACE, Nov. 8). We're subjected to 15 minutes of commercials before a 90-minute movie, ads dancing across the actors' chests in the middle of every TV program and pop-up sales pitches on the Internet, and what can we do about it? How about some writer proving to ad agencies and billion-dollar corporations that instead of increased revenues, all that Invesco, SBC or Monster will get is resentment—and, in some cases, a boycott.

Chris Sutherland, West Haven, Conn.

Once I made my way through 10 pages of messages about cologne, cars, hospitals, DSL and E.D., I really enjoyed Rushin's column about rampant commercialism.

Brent York, Greensboro, N.C.

As the senior director of corporate partnerships for the Memphis Grizzlies, I am proud to say that our fans enjoy games in beautiful FedExForum, park cars in the Ford Parking Garage, entertain clients in the First Tennessee Club Level, socialize in the Jack Daniel's Old #7 Sports Bar and host pregame gatherings in Ledbetter Landing. Rushin earns a living writing for a magazine that exists because of corporate advertising. He should be proud that SI has loyal readers and loyal advertisers.

Chad Bolen, Memphis

Rushin touched a nerve with nearly all sports fans in his article on the constant in-your-face advertising taking place in sports today. While watching the MLB playoffs, I could not help but notice the Fox emblem in the scoring line, the Fox logo burned into the bottom right of the tube or *The Simpsons* on Fox's billboard directly behind the batter. We all know it is just a matter of time before we are cheering for the Boston Red Fox.

Lou Rosetti, Archbald, Pa.

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WALTER IOOSS JR.

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You probably know that cholesterol comes from food. But what you might not know is that your cholesterol has a lot to do with your family history.

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VYTORIN helps block the absorption of cholesterol that comes from food *and* reduces the cholesterol that your body makes naturally. And VYTORIN can dramatically lower your bad cholesterol 45%–60%. (Average effect depending on dose. 52% at the usual starting dose.)

Ask your doctor about NEW VYTORIN.

Important information: VYTORIN is a prescription tablet and isn't right for everyone, including women who are nursing or pregnant or who may become pregnant, and anyone with liver problems. Unexplained muscle pain or weakness could be a sign of a rare but serious side effect and should be reported to your doctor right away. VYTORIN may interact with other medicines or certain foods, increasing your risk of getting this serious side effect. So, tell your doctor about any other medications you are taking.

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VYTORIN™ (ezetimibe/simvastatin) Tablets

Patient Information about VYTORIN (VI-tor-in)
Generic name: ezetimibe/simvastatin tablets

Read this information carefully before you start taking VYTORIN. Review this information each time you refill your prescription for VYTORIN as there may be new information. This information does not take the place of talking with your doctor about your medical condition or your treatment. If you have any questions about VYTORIN, ask your doctor. Only your doctor can determine if VYTORIN is right for you.

What is VYTORIN?

VYTORIN is a medicine used to lower levels of total cholesterol, LDL (bad) cholesterol, and fatty substances called triglycerides in the blood. In addition, VYTORIN raises levels of HDL (good) cholesterol. It is used for patients who cannot control their cholesterol levels by diet alone. You should stay on a cholesterol-lowering diet while taking this medicine.

VYTORIN works to reduce your cholesterol in two ways. It reduces the cholesterol absorbed in your digestive tract, as well as the cholesterol your body makes by itself. VYTORIN does not help you lose weight.

Who should not take VYTORIN?

Do not take VYTORIN:

- If you are allergic to ezetimibe or simvastatin, the active ingredients in VYTORIN, or to the inactive ingredients. For a list of inactive ingredients, see the "Inactive ingredients" section at the end of this information sheet.
- If you have active liver disease or repeated blood tests indicating possible liver problems.
- If you are pregnant, or think you may be pregnant, or planning to become pregnant or breast-feeding.

VYTORIN is not recommended for use in children under 10 years of age.

What should I tell my doctor before and while taking VYTORIN?

Tell your doctor right away if you experience unexplained muscle pain, tenderness, or weakness. This is because on rare occasions, muscle problems can be serious, including muscle breakdown resulting in kidney damage.

The risk of muscle breakdown is greater at higher doses of VYTORIN.

The risk of muscle breakdown is greater in patients with kidney problems.

Taking VYTORIN with certain substances can increase the risk of muscle problems. It is particularly important to tell your doctor if you are taking any of the following:

- cyclosporine
- antifungal agents (such as itraconazole or ketoconazole)
- fibric acid derivatives (such as gemfibrozil, bezafibrate, or fenofibrate)
- the antibiotics erythromycin and clarithromycin
- HIV protease inhibitors (such as indinavir, nelfinavir, ritonavir, and saquinavir)
- the antidepressant nefazodone
- amiodarone (a drug used to treat an irregular heartbeat)
- verapamil (a drug used to treat high blood pressure, chest pain associated with heart disease, or other heart conditions)
- large doses (≥1 g/day) of niacin or nicotinic acid
- large quantities of grapefruit juice (>1 quart daily)

It is also important to tell your doctor if you are taking coumarin anticoagulants (drugs that prevent blood clots, such as warfarin).

Tell your doctor about any prescription and nonprescription medicines you are taking or plan to take, including natural or herbal remedies.

Tell your doctor about all your medical conditions including allergies.

Tell your doctor if you:

- drink substantial quantities of alcohol or ever had liver problems. VYTORIN may not be right for you.
- are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. Do not use VYTORIN if you are pregnant, trying to become pregnant or suspect that you are pregnant. If you become pregnant while taking VYTORIN, stop taking it and contact your doctor immediately.
- are breast-feeding. Do not use VYTORIN if you are breast-feeding.

Tell other doctors prescribing a new medication that you are taking VYTORIN.

How should I take VYTORIN?

- Take VYTORIN once a day, in the evening, with or without food.
- Try to take VYTORIN as prescribed. If you miss a dose, do not take an extra dose. Just resume your usual schedule.
- Continue to follow a cholesterol-lowering diet while taking VYTORIN. Ask your doctor if you need diet information.
- Keep taking VYTORIN unless your doctor tells you to stop. If you stop taking VYTORIN, your cholesterol may rise again.

What should I do in case of an overdose?

Contact your doctor immediately.

What are the possible side effects of VYTORIN?

See your doctor regularly to check your cholesterol level and to check for side effects. Your doctor may do blood tests to check your liver before you start taking VYTORIN and during treatment.

In clinical studies patients reported the following common side effects while taking VYTORIN: headache and muscle pain (see What should I tell my doctor before and while taking VYTORIN?).

The following side effects have been reported in general use with either ezetimibe or simvastatin tablets (tablets that contain the active ingredients of VYTORIN):

- allergic reactions including swelling of the face, lips, tongue, and/or throat that may cause difficulty in breathing or swallowing (which may require treatment right away), and rash; inflammation of the pancreas; nausea; gallstones; inflammation of the gallbladder.

Tell your doctor if you are having these or any other medical problems while on VYTORIN. This is not a complete list of side effects. For a complete list, ask your doctor or pharmacist.

General Information about VYTORIN

Medicines are sometimes prescribed for conditions that are not mentioned in patient information leaflets. Do not use VYTORIN for a condition for which it was not prescribed. Do not give VYTORIN to other people, even if they have the same condition you have. It may harm them.

This summarizes the most important information about VYTORIN. If you would like more information, talk with your doctor. You can ask your pharmacist or doctor for information about VYTORIN that is written for health professionals. For additional information, visit the following web site: vytorin.com.

Inactive ingredients:
Butylated hydroxyanisole NF, citric acid monohydrate USP, croscarmellose sodium NF, hydroxypropyl methylcellulose USP, lactose monohydrate NF, magnesium stearate NF, microcrystalline cellulose NF, and propyl gallate NF.

Issued July 2004

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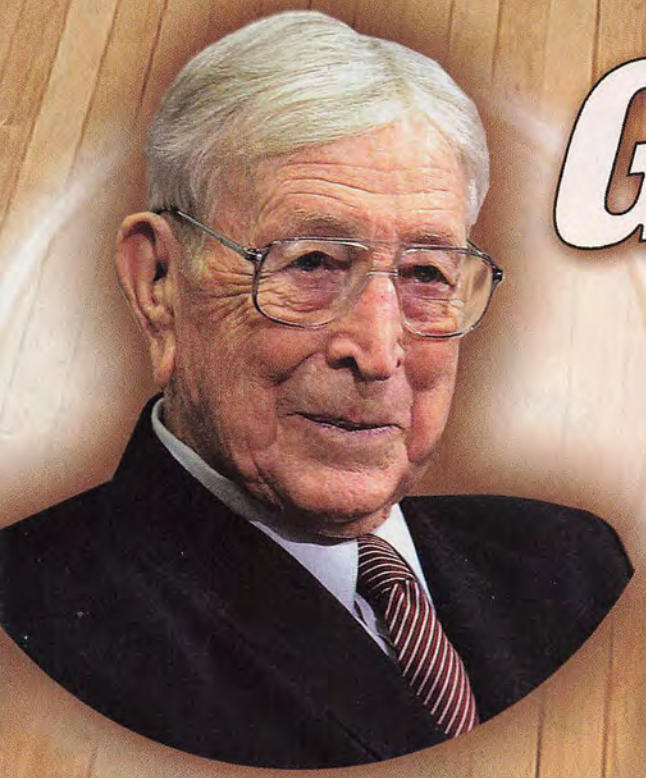

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WE PUT THE S
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SKECHERS

Talk Ain't Cheap

by Charles Leerhsen

THE OTHER day, while working on this column, I put in requests to talk to Barry Bonds and Alex Rodriguez, and I prayed to God they would not call me back. Not that I was trembling at the prospect of speaking to a pair of legends-in-the-making. No, I was trembling at the prospect of speaking to the person who scrutinizes my expense reports, because Bonds and A-Rod have begun charging money to talk to people, and a chat starts at $7,500.

I exaggerate, but not much. The Giant and the Yankee will turn pro as conversationalists on Dec. 10 when The Ultimate Experience happens at the Marriott Marquis in Times Square. Admission to the event, run by the players' merchandising companies, A-Rod Authenticated and Pro Access, is $7,500; it jumps to $10,000 if you bring a child or a date. For that sum you get drinks, hors d'oeuvres and what Scot Monette, A-Rod Authenticated's event organizer, calls "a high-end intimate experience." If that sounds like what Heidi Fleiss got busted for, don't worry. All he means is that Bonds and A-Rod will work the room, schmoozing the customers ("not more than 75," says a Bonds spokesman; "75 to 100" according to the A-Rod camp). If you have a fear of intimacy, this is the intimate event for you.

"Each encounter will last about five minutes," says Jeff Bernstein, managing director of Pro Access. "And I don't expect anyone will bring up controversial topics in an environment like this. If they do, Barry knows how to handle himself."

"I don't want to speculate on the length of each meeting," says Monette. "But when A-Rod looks you in the eye and talks to you for even two minutes—let me tell you, you have had an *experience*."

As my grandmother used to say, so did the lady who sat on the eggbeater.

But wait, there's more! Each guest will have his picture taken with the players and receive a gift bag containing a watch, autographed ball, cigars, a flip-book, a T-shirt and other items that—by Monette's math—are worth $4,500. The evening concludes with an auction in which attendees can spend thousands more on Bonds and A-Rod autographed bats, balls and life-sized bobbleheads.

The question is, how many life-sized bobbleheads will ante up for this, especially if they can't pretend it's for a good cause? Monette says Rodriguez is giving away his share of the proceeds (probably about $750,000 after expenses), but for Bonds, charity's not an issue at all. "This event," says Bernstein, "is squarely in the for-profit section of Barry's portfolio."

So who will turn out for this autograph show on steroids? The promoters needn't set aside any cocktail weenies for Barry Halper, a minority owner of the Yankees who has donated a trove of memorabilia to the baseball Hall of Fame. "I've spent for some crazy stuff," says Halper, who once owned Ty Cobb's dentures. "But an A-Rod 'experience'? How about he hits a few balls through the infield in the postseason? That's the kind of A-Rod experience I'd like."

If you hate the idea behind this event, there's worse news: Many sports merchandisers expect it to be a success, perhaps even an industry milestone like that moment in the late '70s when Mickey Mantle, seeing the light at the end of the carpel tunnel, realized he sold *more* autographed baseballs when he charged $50 instead of $5.

"There's a pent-up demand for closeness with athletes," says Bill Fleming, CEO of a sports memorabilia authentification company called TracerCode. "A-Rod's no slouch, and Bonds is the holy grail for collectors because he's made himself so scarce." But hasn't Bonds's aloofness turned off fans? "It doesn't matter," says Michael Barnes, a St. Louis–based sports marketing agent. "This kind of thing is driven by baby boomers. They're not even from Bonds's generation. They just want to get close to *baseball*." Todd McFarlane, the comic book creator *(Spawn)* who has become a serious player in the memorabilia business, says he expects a crowd of "relatively well-off men—women just don't get this sort of thing—who have come to terms with being sports geeks. These guys live in rooms that are already littered with all sorts of memorabilia. Now they want a story, the ability to say, 'One night I met Bonds and A-Rod.' They will gladly pay the asking price and go home with a smile on their face."

Barry Bonds and Alex Rodriguez have begun charging money to talk to people, and a chat starts at $7,500.

Time will tell if Bonds and A-Rod dance geek-to-geek in the Marriott ballroom or slink away to rethink their merchandising schemes. Meanwhile, there's the matter of why superstars who each make upward of $20 million a year would do this. I also wonder who, if anyone, Bonds and A-Rod would pay $7,500 to meet and greet. I may wonder forever. Neither man called me back to discuss his ultimate intimate, high-end experience.

I'm probably the richer for it. □

Steve Rushin is on vacation; for a collection of his columns, go to **si.com/writers.**

MEL LEVINE

STATE FARM EDDIE ROBINSON COACH OF DISTINCTION AWARD

Coaches With Class

LEGENDARY COACH EDDIE ROBINSON, WHO LED Division I-AA Grambling for 57 seasons, rewrote football's record books with 408 career wins. Division III St. John's (Minn.) coach John Gagliardi broke that mark last year, but Coach Rob always thought other numbers defined him better. "I'm proud of the fact I can summarize my life by saying I've had one wife and one job," Robinson has said.

Those stats speak volumes about his devotion to family both immediate and extended–the players who learned from him. Now in its seventh year, the State Farm Eddie Robinson Coach of Distinction Award honors Robinson's legacy as champion and mentor. Since 1998, six coaches–Penn State's Joe Paterno, Tennessee's Phillip Fulmer, then-Stanford coach Tyrone Willingham, Fisher DeBerry of Air Force, Larry Coker of Miami and Ohio State's Jim Tressel–have been honored both for their teams' excellence and the leadership they provide as teachers and citizens.

All Division I-A and I-AA coaches were eligible. Judges are former BYU coach LaVell Edwards, Southern California athletic director Mike Garrett, Indiana State AD Andrea Myers, SWAC commissioner Robert Vowels and Football Writers Association of America president Dick Weiss.

The State Farm Eddie Robinson Coach of Distinction Award winner, who will be announced during Saturday's State Farm Bayou Classic between Southern and Grambling on NBC, will receive a $25,000 donation for his school's general scholarship fund–affirming the values shared by Robinson and 2004's four finalists below.–*Alec Morrison*

Kirk Ferentz, IOWA

Ferentz, 49, entered his sixth season at Iowa on the heels of the school's best-ever two-year run. The Hawkeyes went 21–5 in 2002–03. In '02, Iowa won a share of its first Big Ten title in 12 years, and Ferentz was AP national coach of the year.

Ferentz serves on the national advisory board for the Bethesda Family Services Foundation, helping those who are troubled. He's given time to the Children's Miracle Network, fund-raisers for the American Heart Association and Iowa Arts Festival, and he was honorary chair for Iowa's 1999–00 United Way campaign. Ferentz and his wife, Mary, also made a $100,000 gift to the school's College of Liberal Arts.

Urban Meyer, UTAH

In less than two seasons leading the Utes, Meyer has a 20–2 record. This year's team, 10–0 through Nov. 18, is trying to become the first from a non-major conference to receive a BCS berth.

Meyer, 40, created the Utah football leadership committee so deserving players can have a say in team policy, and the group also helps discipline teammates. Meyer has given time to the Murray/Salt Lake City Chamber of Commerce and the West Valley Fire Department. He's raised funds for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society and National Kidney Foundation, and he runs free football clinics at area high schools.

Paul Pasqualoni, SYRACUSE

In his 14 years coaching the Orange, Pasqualoni, 55, has led Syracuse to eight bowl games and three 10-win seasons. His teams won three straight Big East titles from 1996 to '98, capping that final campaign with a trip to the Orange Bowl.

Pasqualoni and his wife, Jill, support the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, and he's also done work benefiting the Make-A-Wish Foundation, National Kidney Foundation of Central New York and a local Boys and Girls Club. Orange players read to students in elementary schools, help build Habitat for Humanity housing and also take part in Onondaga County Special Olympics ceremonies.

Joe Taylor, HAMPTON

Through Nov. 18, the 54-year-old Taylor had won 108 games at Hampton, most ever for a Pirates coach, in 13 seasons. His 2004 squad has clinched Taylor's third MEAC title, guaranteeing the coach a third trip to the Division I-AA playoffs.

On campus, Taylor helps students plan activities and raise funds for various causes, and he sponsors marathon runners to support the American Cancer Society. Taylor regularly attends Fellowship of Christian Athletes meetings, and he formed a gospel choir in which his players sing. The former American Football Coaches Association president now chairs the AFCA's minority issues committee.

FROM LEFT: CAROLYN KASTER/AP; JIM WEBER/AP; DOUG PENSINGER/GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY OF HAMPTON UNIVERSITY

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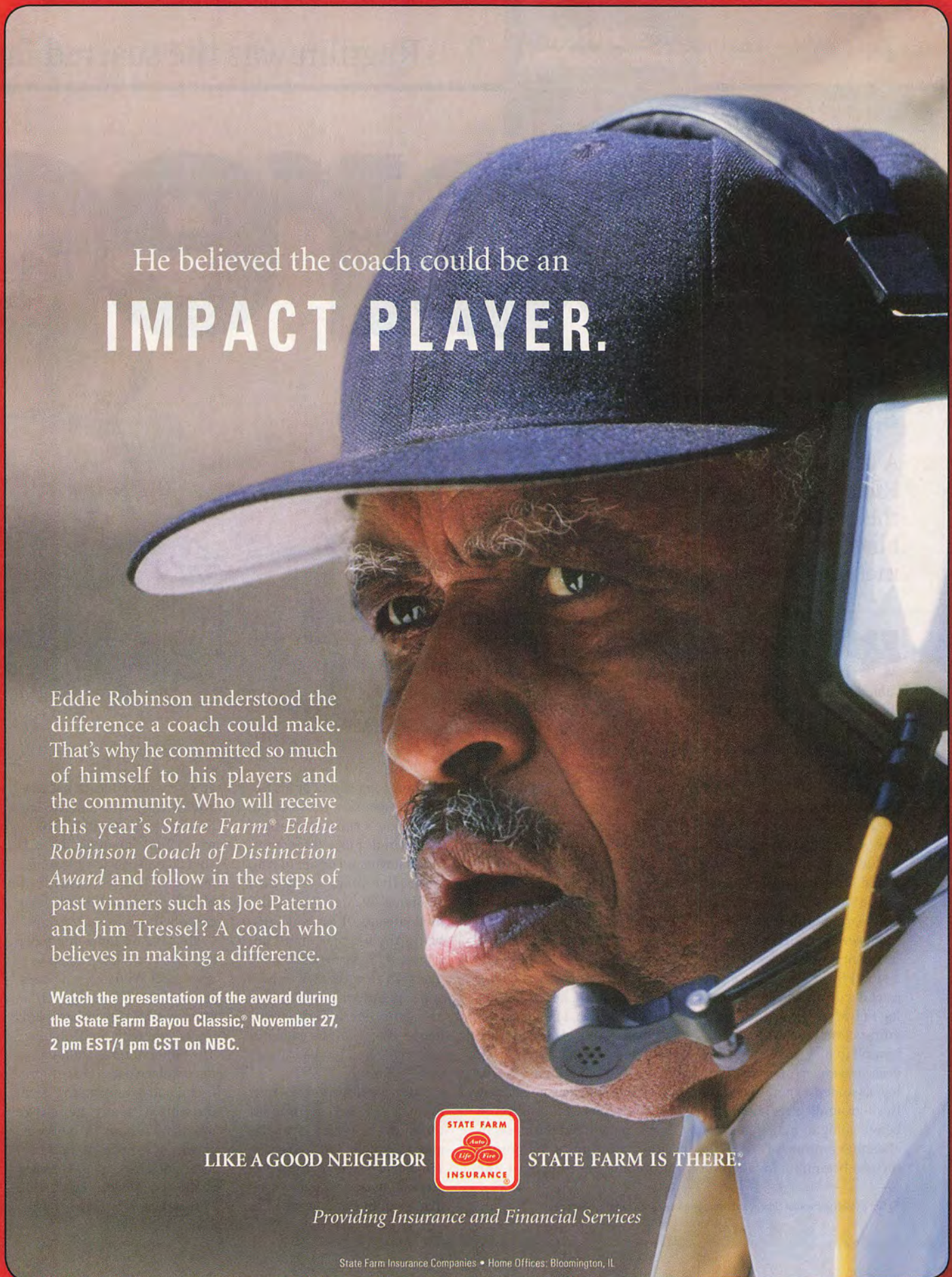
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Ragulin was the scarred face

Scorecard

Simply Ricky

A return to the NFL could solve Ricky Williams's money woes, but the ex-Dolphin says he's living a blissfully bare-bones life that doesn't include football **By Michael Silver**

RICKY WILLIAMS was at a crossroads, and he pondered his next move. "Should we walk into town, or should we go to the river?" Williams wondered aloud last Wednesday on a gorgeous Northern California afternoon. "It's a tough call, because both experiences would be incredible, but we only have time for one before it gets dark. Town would be cool, but the river would be more dangerous."

The world's most notorious milk-carton athlete and I had spent several hours in the one-bedroom house he's renting in a small Sierra foothill town, catching up on things, butchering Bob Marley tunes on cheap guitars (Williams is teaching himself to play) and eating the delicious *kichadi* (mung dal, barley, assorted vegetables and fresh-ground spices) he made before going to Indian healing class that morning. Now, with the sun beginning to fade, we had finally become motivated to seek an adventure.

Read into it what you will, but the man who four months ago walked away from a $5 million-a-year job carrying the football for the Miami Dolphins chose the more ambitious option. Soon we were in his $100,000 Hummer, charging down a steep trail filled with holes bigger than the ones Williams ran through at Texas. Tree branches scraped burnt-orange paint off the hood as the vehicle slipped and slid through the trenches. "What's the point of having a Hummer if you're not going to take it off-road?" Williams asked with a laugh. "I mean, hey, if I'm not going to be rich, I might as well get the most out of my toys while I still have them."

In September an arbitrator ruled that Williams must repay the Dolphins $8.6 million in bonus money. But the most obvious solution to his money problems—a return to the NFL—is complicated by his facing a suspension for violating the league's substance-abuse policy and, more important, by his having no desire to play. In the five years I've known Williams I've never seen him more at ease. "I can't imagine being any happier than I am right now," Williams said. "If my decision to walk away upset some people, I'm sorry. But everyone has a right to be happy—it's what the constitution says—and football wasn't doing it for me."

After spending the first months of his retirement traveling—he visited Japan, Jamaica, Australia and Thailand—Williams became interested in *ayurveda*, an ancient Indian healing discipline, and enrolled in an 18-month educational program at a small institute in California's gold country. "That's what I'll do with my life," he said. "But I'll heal people for free, and that way I'll have a network of places to stay and people who care about me."

He says he loves his new, stripped-down life. Thanks to a vegan diet Williams, who does most of his own cooking, weighs 210 pounds, 30 less than his playing weight with the Dolphins. The father of three children by three women doesn't have a girlfriend and says he hasn't been intimate with anyone in two months. With no TV he keeps abreast of the outside world by means of a high-speed Internet connection. While he hasn't seen the 1–9 Dolphins play—"I wish

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of the Soviet hockey juggernaut.

—TO RUSSIA, WITH LOVE, PAGE 22

ard

they weren't struggling so much," he says—he sat in the stands and saw his hometown Chargers defeat the Titans in October. And he adds that he got kicked out of an Angels–Red Sox ALDS game in Anaheim because he wasn't wearing shoes. ("I was barefoot," Williams explained, "because I cut up my foot during a hike in the Australian rain forest. I stepped in some quicksand and lost both my shoes while pulling myself out, and then I cut up my foot pretty bad.")

Other than twice-weekly yoga classes he isn't exerting himself physically. "I did play basketball the other night," Williams said, "and this guy I'd just met came up to me afterward and gave me a paper bag full of weed. He's like the fourth guy who's done that since I've gotten here." He last felt the pull of football while sitting in a hotel bar in Thailand in September and watching a few minutes of the Raiders' victory over the Buccaneers. The sight of Oakland coach Norv Turner, Williams's offensive coordinator last year with the Dolphins, made him sentimental, so he booked a flight back to the U.S. and contemplated a return. But, he said, "after two days of hearing all that noise about whether I'd come back or not, I was like, There's no way in hell I'm playing."

As the last rays of sunlight reflected off the river, we stood on the rocks above listening to the water's roar and admiring the foliage lining the canyon. "I've never had a chance to experience the fall like this," Williams said, smiling peacefully.

We got back into the Hummer and began our return to civilization. Soon we saw a man with a pronounced limp walking his bike. Williams stopped and told him to hop in and "just throw the bike in the back." When we dropped off the cyclist, the man, who seemed unaware of his benefactor's identity, gratefully pulled out a small Baggie full of thick, green buds and handed Williams the contraband.

Williams drove on, Marley's *Positive Vibrations* blasting through the speakers. "This is perfect," Williams said. "I knew coming here was the right choice."

ILLUSTRATION BY STEVE BRODNER; LARRY DOWNING/REUTERS (WILLIAMS); EVAN VUCCI/AP (PROTESTOR)

Capital Punishment

All the Washington Nationals need is an owner—and a place to play baseball

The name has changed, but the problems remain. The team formerly known as the Montreal Expos—who spent the last three embarrassing seasons as a ward of Major League Baseball, shuttling between a deserted stadium in Canada and a substandard one in San Juan for the past two—have a new name, the Washington Nationals, and new caps, which were unveiled on Monday. But no matter how you dress them up, they still face uncertain living quarters, unknown ownership and a roster that leaves them unlikely to contend.

Washington won the Expos primarily on the strength of its stadium plan, an owner-friendly public-financing package to construct a $440 million ballpark, less than a mile from the Capitol. (The team will play in RFK Stadium for the next three years.) Financing needs to be approved by the city council by Dec. 31, but local discontent (recent polls have showed residents disapprove of a publicly funded stadium by a 2-to-1 margin, and a man protesting stadium funding disrupted Monday's press conference) has delayed the approval process. Instead of rubber-stamping the plan, the council now wants the city to consider private-financing options. While a compromise is expected to be reached, every day without an agreement is another day the team spends in limbo.

BAD CALL Mayor Anthony Williams (top) pledged millions for a park—but protestors are speaking up.

MLB has received bid applications and $100,000 deposits from more than 20 groups. The league will affix a minimum $300 million price to the franchise and has fantasies about getting $400 million, but, says one potential buyer, the team's true value is in the 200s. Once a winning bid is made, the league will begin a vetting process, including approval by the other 29 owners, that will take at least two months. But the bidding itself could be held up until MLB and Orioles owner Peter Angelos agree on the amount of equity Angelos will have in a proposed regional sports network that would televise Baltimore's and Washington's games. Angelos wants a majority stake in the network as compensation for accepting a team in his backyard. Until the issue is resolved, bidders will have a hard time calculating the Nationals' value.

MLB hired Jim Bowden as caretaker G.M. three weeks ago. He acquired Jose Guillen from the Angels, but it will be difficult for the Nationals to significantly improve their anemic lineup until an owner arrives—which won't happen until after the premium free agents have been snapped up. "There's a lot to work out between now and Opening Day," says an MLB executive, "and the clock is starting to tick pretty fast." *—Daniel G. Habib*

Gender Bender

In a topsy-turvy tennis season, the two professional tours swapped identities

TENNIS OFF-SEASON is essentially an oxymoron. But now that most players are idle for a few weeks before their Australian Open preparation begins, we can officially declare 2004 the Year of Gender Role Reversal. For so long a singular dominant player—Steffi Graf, Martina Hingis, a Williams—ruled the WTA's roost, while the ATP was a study in Any Given Sunday parity. Not so in 2004. A different woman won each of the four major singles titles; and the players who finished one and two in the year-end rankings, the evergreen Lindsay Davenport and France's Amelie Mauresmo, failed to so much as reach the final of a Grand Slam event. Meanwhile, Switzerland's Roger Federer simply played another sport than the rest of the men's field. The Swiss stylist won three majors, went 69–6 and garnished his sterling year on Sunday when he defended his title at the Masters Cup.

BACKHANDED COMPLIMENT Federer displayed a ladylike touch; Sharapova used muscle.

The flip-flopping doesn't end there. Remember when the tennis Cassandras predicted that ballistic ball-striking would doom the men's game? Now many of the top players—Federer among them—can go an entire set without hitting an unreturnable serve. On the other hand, power has all but become a prereq for success in the women's game. Maria Sharapova, the 17-year-old Wimbledon champ, might move awkwardly and volley inexpertly, but so long as she pastes the ball the way she did when she won the WTA Championships last week in L.A., her status as a star is secure. Men's tennis even had an Anna Kournikova analogue in 2004. Mark Philippoussis, a hunky Australian, won only 11 matches all year but became a tabloid fixture when he was linked to—yes, you knew it—Paris Hilton.

There were other tectonic shifts as well. Owing to both injury and indifference, the Williams sisters relinquished their grip on the game, Serena finishing at No. 7 and Venus at No. 9. After years of underachieving, the U.S. team reached the Davis Cup final. The Russian Revolution was consecrated when Soviettes won three Grand Slam titles and represented four of the top six WTA players. Say this: If form holds and tennis tours keep swapping identities, 2005 ought to be a hell of a year for Russia's Marat Safin.

—L. Jon Wertheim

Go Figure

48 Consecutive games in which Miami (Ohio) wideout Michael Larkin has caught a pass, an NCAA record.

72.3 Percentage of those who voted who do not want to see Pedro Martinez pitch for the Yankees next season, according to a poll in the *New York Post* last week.

2 Unbeaten, untied seasons for Harvard's football team, which finished 10–0, since 2001.

0 Perfect seasons for the Crimson from 1913 to 2000.

4 Security guards Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez assigned to protect Johan Santana when the AL Cy Young Award winner returned to his native country last week.

14 Losing football seasons for Temple in its 14 years in the Big East, which is kicking the team out of the conference for failing to be competitive.

Knee Jerk Reactions

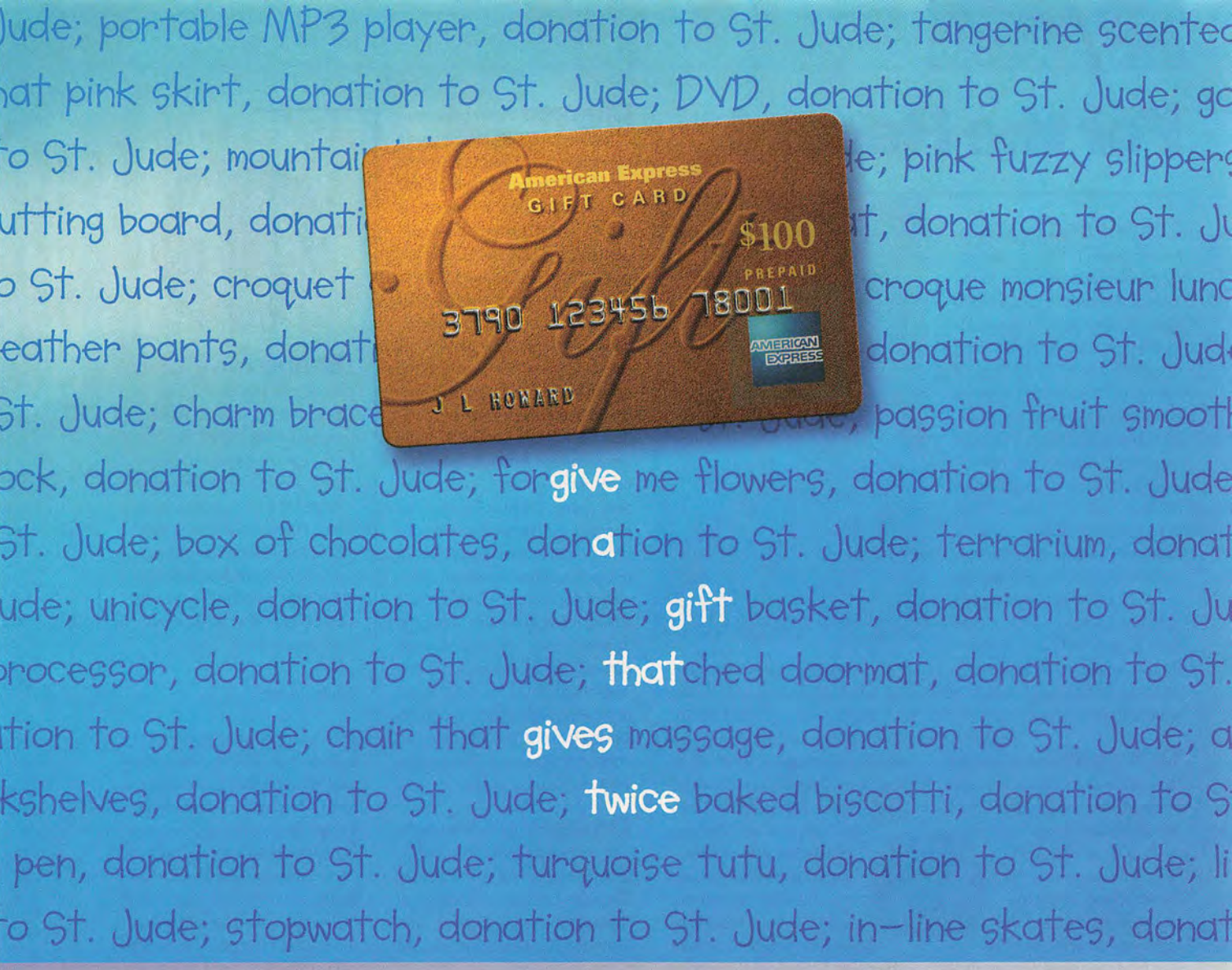
The feud between Carolina's punter and the Gramaticas is getting ugly

Kickers inhabit an insular world, and it isn't big enough for Panthers punter Todd Sauerbrun and the Gramatica brothers, the first family of placekicking. Last week Carolina considered signing free agent Bill Gramatica (whose older brother, Martin, kicks for the Buccaneers; their youngest brother, Santiago, kicks for South Florida) to replace the injured John Kasay. Sauerbrun, also the Panthers' holder, blocked the deal, saying, "He's a stereotype kicker just like the rest of his brothers; that's all he'll ever be. There's no place for him here." (The team signed Jeff Chandler instead.) Sauerbrun and the Gramaticas have feuded since 2002, when the punter criticized Martin for celebrating a game-winning field goal and Santiago stood by the Panthers' locker room and taunted Sauerbrun. After another '02 game Martin had to be restrained from attacking Sauerbrun. Last week Sauerbrun called the brothers "f------ greaseballs."

Sauerbrun, who calls himself the best punter in NFL history, offered to fill in for Kasay—if the Panthers refunded some of the $40,000 they've fined him this season for being overweight. (He's slightly above his limit of 217 pounds.) "I hate to disappoint him," coach John Fox said, "but he's not placekicking, and he's not getting his money back."

BLOCK THAT KICKER! Sauerbrun (left) talked the Panthers out of giving Bill Gramatica a job.

RICHARD CARSON/REUTERS (FEDERER); SIMON BRUTY (SHARAPOVA); JC RIDLEY/WIREIMAGE.COM (GRAMATICA); ROBERT B. STANTON/WIREIMAGE.COM (SAUERBRUN)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For the Record

Dismissed By prosecutors in Denver, a misdemeanor marijuana possession charge against Nuggets star Carmelo Anthony. On Oct. 15 a bag containing less than an ounce of the drug was found in Anthony's backpack as he waited to board a plane for a preseason game. Anthony said the pot belonged to a friend, James Cunningham, and after Cunningham signed an affidavit saying the drugs were, in fact, his, prosecutors cleared Anthony—who had passed four random drug tests last season as well as his tests during the Summer Olympics. The charge didn't carry jail time, but Anthony's image could have taken a substantial hit. "The case has upset Carmelo a great deal because he does not want his fans, especially the kids, to get the wrong impression of him," said his lawyer, Daniel Recht.

Distributed With little fanfare in a basement conference room of the St. Pete Times Forum, the Tampa Bay Lightning's Stanley Cup rings. During the NHL lockout teams are prohibited from having contact with players, but the Lightning received permission from the league to have players pick up their baubles (each contains 138 diamonds, one for each of Tampa Bay's 106 points during the regular season and two for each of its 16 postseason victories) at the Forum. Only 15 players showed up—league MVP Martin St. Louis and star center Vincent Lecavalier, who are playing in Europe, were among the missing—and afterward the group had a low-key lunch at a hotel across the street. "This should have been at the Forum, in front of 22,000 people," center Tim Taylor said. "I personally feel the NHL has taken some of that away from us."

Charged With obstruction of justice for faking a motorcycle accident to avoid drug tests on the eve of the Athens Olympics, Greek sprinters Konstantinos Kenteris and Katerina Thanou. On Aug. 12 Kenteris, the Olympic 200-meter gold medalist in 2000, and Thanou, who won silver in the 100 meters in Sydney, missed a doping test because, they said, their motorcycle skidded off a slippery road on the way to the Olympic Village. Athenian prosecutors now say the accident never happened. The runners were slapped with misdemeanor obstruction charges; meanwhile, their coach, Christos Tzekos, was charged with importing and supplying banned substances. Seven doctors and five witnesses were also charged with perjury and falsifying medical reports. Kenteris, 31, and Thanou, 29, are unlikely to face jail time if convicted, but this week the International Association of Athletic Federations will begin looking into charges that they also dodged drug tests in Chicago and Tel Aviv this past summer.

Dropped As an endorser by Titleist, British golfer Paul Casey, 27, who was quoted in *The Sunday Times* of London as saying he "hates" Americans. Casey—who attended Arizona State, has an American girlfriend and will play full time in the U.S. next year—later said he was trying to convey how intense international competitions can be. "Americans do have a tendency to wind people up," he said. "When they are chanting, 'U-S-A,' and there are lots of them, it just makes you want to beat them even more. That's the point I wanted to get across. But I don't hate Americans." Nonetheless, Titleist, which supplies him with clubs and balls, won't renew his contract when it expires at the end of the year.

Banned In Great Britain, the ancient sport of fox hunting. After years of debate between animal-rights activists and devotees of the blood sport, the House of Commons forced the ban into law over the objection of Prime Minister Tony Blair. Hunting supporters say the ban will cripple Britain's hound-breeding industry and leave the country overrun with foxes.

STEPHEN HIRD/REUTERS (FOX HUNTING); TASS-SOVFOTO (RAGULIN); INTERGOLD/TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING (RING); GARRETT W. ELLWOOD/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES (ANTHONY)

To Russia, with Love

Turning his broad back on the NHL, Alexander Ragulin became a Soviet hero

IT SOUNDS QUAINT in this globalized era, the idea that politics might keep a top athlete from seeking fame and fortune. "I could have played in the NHL," Alexander Ragulin, a pillar of the Soviet Union teams that dominated international hockey in the 1960s and '70s, said a few years ago. "But I never thought about leaving. That would have meant defecting, and that would have made me a traitor to my country."

To many North Americans, Ragulin, who died last week of a heart attack at age 63, was the scarred face of the Soviet juggernaut. One of the world's most intimidating defensemen, he stood 6' 1" and weighed 225 pounds at a time when few players topped 200. Between 1962 and '73 he won three Olympic gold medals and 10 world titles, and he's in the International Ice Hockey Federation Hall of Fame.

BEAR HUG The rugged Ragulin (left) wrestled with Phil Esposito in '72.

Ragulin became well-known in the West during the Summit Series between Canada and the U.S.S.R. in 1972, which Canada won. After retiring in '73 he spent his life in Moscow, coaching and organizing teammate reunions. "Perhaps some good came from our losing," he said. "If we had won, then no one in Canada would want to remember our names."

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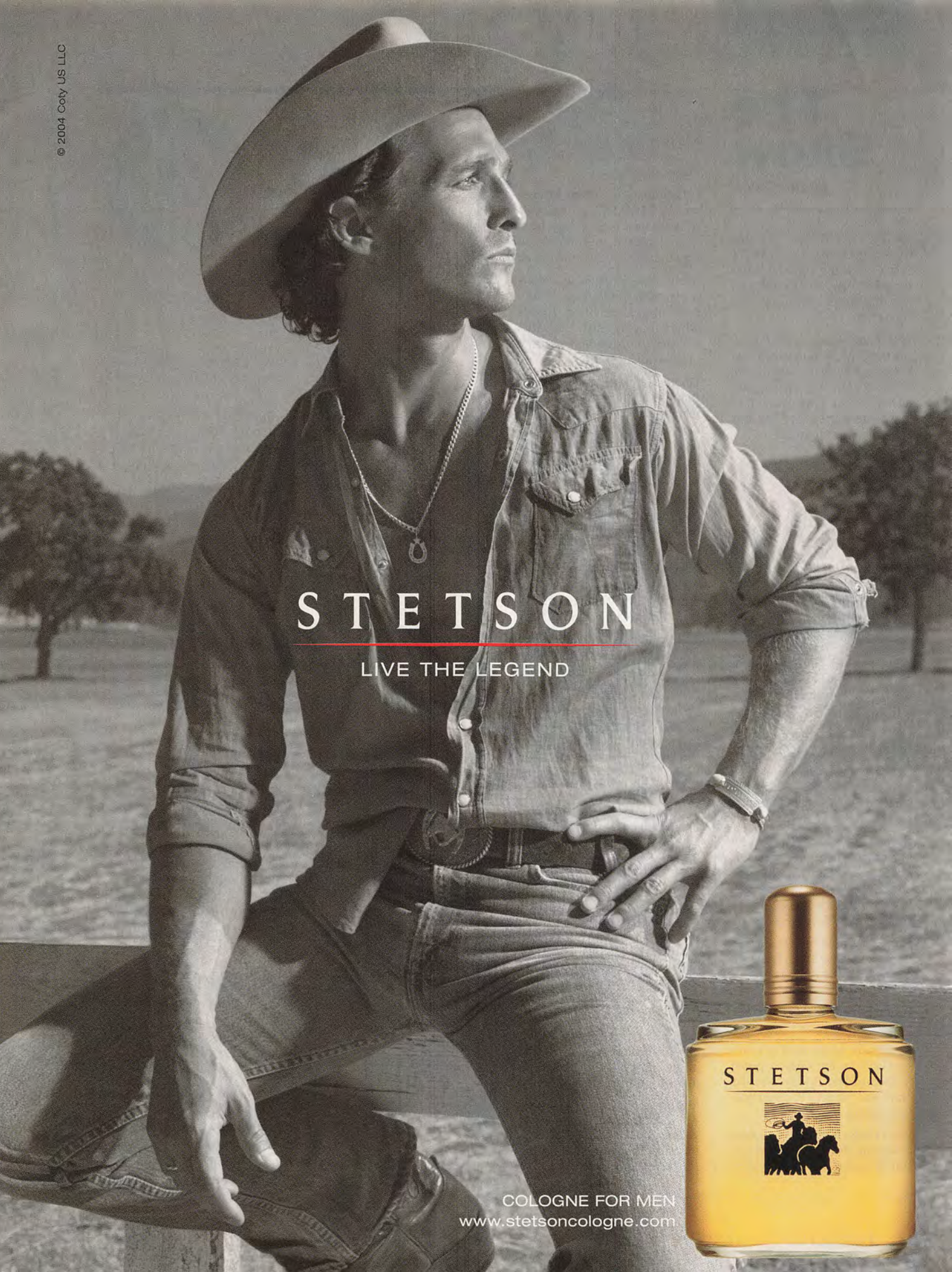

The Show

By Bill Scheft

GOOD NEWS. Starting this week, there's a new policy at The Palace of Auburn Hills: If Pistons security doesn't arrive in 30 minutes or less, the soda dumped on you is free.

***MNF* opening leaves everybody skittish** The NFL may be overreacting just a bit. Now they're thinking of hiring departing attorney general John Ashcroft to make sure Warren Sapp's breasts are covered at all times.

Why can't ABC have programming the entire family can enjoy, like the Vibe Awards?

Say what you will about Terrell Owens, the man runs a very disciplined cross-promotional route.

Next Monday, ABC plans to go with something safe—Bea Arthur handing Joe Gibbs a prescription for Levitra.

Despite losing to the Falcons, Eli Manning showed promise in his first start. His father, Archie, was on the phone most of the game. It was Philip Rivers begging to get him out of San Diego.

Huge suspensions for Pacers It's serious. Ron Artest has been banned indefinitely from promoting an R&B album.

Wait a minute. Is this the Artest Formerly Known as Prince?

Everybody agrees they've never seen anything like what happened in Detroit last Friday. Not the brawl and the riot—Rasheed Wallace playing peacemaker.

Vince Carter is no longer allowed to wear his iPod during warmups. Unless the MP3 is a motivational speaker chanting, "You want to stay in Toronto. . . . You love Toronto. . . . The winters are mild. . . . Rafer Alston is a disciplined point guard. . . . Tracy McGrady isn't happy elsewhere. . . ."

Oklahoma coach Bob Stoops claims ESPN has an "agenda" that favors the SEC Hey, keep talking like that and you'll get a spot in President Bush's cabinet.

Meanwhile, Joe Paterno is starting to talk about a plan of succession at Penn State. Here's where it gets weird. He wants to coach until 2008, then turn it over to Conan O'Brien.

Hootie Johnson denied reports that Steve Spurrier would get a membership at Augusta if he takes over for Lou Holtz at South Carolina. Wouldn't it be great if Hootie had to check with his wife first?

Nationals sign Vinny Castilla and Cristian Guzman O.K., that takes care of the left side of the infield. Now, all they need is the actual infield.

Last week Pedro Martinez met with George Steinbrenner. Wait a minute. Did this receive approval from Child Services?

The Brewers signed Pat Borders to a minor league contract. Well, that certainly proves they're committed to winning—in 1994.

Lightning receives Stanley Cup rings The team picked them up in a specially designated line at the Tampa Department of Labor.

Actually, the players received the rings in the basement of the St. Pete Times Forum. And then they all left on their paper routes.

Thanks to the lockout, attendance at CFL games increased noticeably. And the new fans love that there's no red line.

New York City cites success of Republican Convention as proof it can host 2012 Olympics Yeah, once you've rigged up a decent sound system, pepper-sprayed protesters and perfected the balloon drop, you're ready for the Games.

Snoop Dogg attends USC football practice Pete Carroll had him work with Matt Leinart on the two-minizzle drahzizzle.

My time is up. You've been great. Enjoy Asia.

Bill Scheft is cowriting *Wolfgang Puck's Hot Stove Cookbook*.

Q+A

Pat LaFontaine

The fifth-highest scoring American in NHL history completed the Ironman Florida Triathlon earlier this month

SI: You turn 40 next February. For some guys that means it's time to buy a sports car. You ran a triathlon. Why?

LaFontaine: I stopped playing when I was 33, and I remember a couple of years before I retired I was watching the Hawaii Ironman. There was, like, a 62-year-old nun and a 71-year-old man who finished in the dark. I was so inspired I said to myself at that moment, If they can do it, I'm definitely going to do an Ironman before I'm 40.

SI: You finished in 13 hours, six minutes and 49 seconds. How did you feel at the end?

LaFontaine: I was running on pure adrenaline. It was something I never thought I would do, but I had a tremendous amount of inspiration. I dedicated the race not only to the kids of our foundation [Companions in Courage Foundation, which builds playrooms in children's hospitals] but also to my mom, Gisele, who we lost in July.

SI: How difficult was training?

LaFontaine: As hockey players we are kind of built for short, compact power moves—spurts of speed. It was like trying to teach a thoroughbred to be a trotter.

SI: You suffered several concussions during your career. Do you feel any residual effects?

LaFontaine: I've been fortunate. I've had no residual effects whatsoever. I got out just in time.

SI: Is this your last triathlon or the beginning of a new athletic career?

LaFontaine: The director of my foundation called and said, "The good news is, we've probably raised close to $40,000. The bad news is, you're going to have to do this every year." I think I may do a triathlon next July in Lake Placid and have a charity hockey game. I'm sure it will give people another chance to say, "Pat, you must have hit your head again." —*Richard Deitsch*

BRIAN WINKLER/WIREIMAGE.COM (LAFONTAINE); JIM JOHNSON (LAFONTAINE ON BIKE); BILL SIKES/AP (LAFONTAINE IN UNIFORM); ILLUSTRATION BY JEFF WONG

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The Beat

By Lisa Altobelli

WHEN RAPPER **Snoop Dogg** paid a surprise visit to the USC campus on Nov. 16 and attempted to catch a 40-yard pass from quarterback **Matt Leinart**, the result brought to mind the title of the rapper's new song: *Drop It Like It's Hot*. Snoop insisted he would have made the grab had it been a game situation. "Ain't nobody sticking me, that's why I dropped it," he said. Snoop *(left)* swung by the Trojans' field to film a segment for *Stand In*, a new celebrity reality show airing on mtvU on Nov. 29, and Trojans coach **Pete Carroll** okayed the visit since it was a bye week. "On a normal game week it wouldn't have happened," said Carroll. "He did a great job. He was fun and gracious."

■ Red Sox outfielder **Johnny Damon** did plenty of damage in the Bronx—his grand slam iced Game 7 of the ALCS win over the Yankees—and now he's causing a ruckus in Brooklyn too. Someone has been stenciling a 10-inch image of the slugger on lampposts in the borough, and many local residents are not amused. "Breaking the Curse is still no excuse for defacing public property," said Brooklyn borough president **Marty Markowitz**. Damon admirers can find a more permanent picture of him in this week's PEOPLE, in which he's featured as one of the magazine's Sexiest Men Alive.

■ A portfolio of 25 pasty MIT students in Speedos might not sound like the perfect stocking stuffer, but that didn't deter the school's men's swimming and diving team from posing for a 2005 calendar. Without notifying the administration, the team started hawking the Guaranteed Wet calendar on its website for $10. Then the school found out and ordered the calendar to be pulled. In a letter to fans on the site, **David Friend**, a.k.a. Mr. December, wrote that the problem was "something about MIT being a prestigious institution and the calendar not altogether in accordance with our incoming president's views." . . . **Broadway Joe Namath** will be rolling down his namesake avenue on Thursday. For the first time the NFL will have a float in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. The field-on-wheels will carry Namath and other former greats such as **Tony Dorsett** and **Harry Carson**. . . . **Eddie**, the Jack Russell terrier from *Frasier*, may have gone into retirement when the show wrapped last May, but his purebred son **Enzo** is following in his pa's pawsteps. At the National Dog Show, broadcast by NBC starting at noon on Thanksgiving, Enzo will appear with host **John O'Hurley** (J. Peterman of *Seinfeld*) in spots throughout the two-hour special. . . . The Professional Bull Riders won't be sending in the clowns this season when riders are thrown from their mounts. They'll use the Dickies DuraBullfighters, whose protective gear does not include oversized shoes. The bull fighters and bullriders kicked off the new season last Thursday night with a bartop hoedown at Hogs & Heifers in New York City.

PICTURE THIS It was overshadowed by the Friday night fight in Detroit *(page 44)*, but the pregame fracas between South Carolina and Clemson players the following day was no less disturbing. Clemson's Yusef Kelly *(right)* emerged from the fray with an unidentified Gamecock's helmet, which he eventually tossed into the stands. It took a battalion of state troopers to break up the brawl, which at one point stretched over half the field.

THIS WEEK'S SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE

Bengals wide receiver Chad Johnson asked fans for donations to help pay for a celebration fine he was planning to incur.

They Said It

WES MOORE

Chattanooga women's basketball coach, comparing his team with No. 1 Tennessee: "Their freshmen were high school McDonald's All-Americans; our freshmen ate at McDonald's in high school."

MIC SMITH/CHARLESTON POST AND COURIER/AP (PICTURE THIS); MARK HUMPHREY/AP (MOORE); AARON SHOWALTER/N.Y. DAILY NEWS (DAMON); REED SAXON/AP (SNOOP DOGG)

The Week Ahead

What to watch and watch for **By Julia Morrill**

FRIDAY 26

Heat at Pistons ESPN 8 p.m. | Shaquille O'Neal returns to Detroit for the first time since the NBA Finals, but this time the outcome may be different. His current high-scoring sidekick, Dwyane Wade, actually likes to pass the ball. He's averaging 7.2 assists per game.

SATURDAY 27

The Bayou Classic Grambling State vs. Southern NBC 2 p.m. | The halftime Battle of the Bands makes this a classic. **Erik Morales vs. Marco Antonio Barrera HBO PPV 9 p.m.** | Morales, the super featherweight champ, meets the only man who's beaten him.

SUNDAY 28

***Sports Illustrated's Sportsman of the Year 2004* FOX 4:30 p.m.** | Before unveiling our pick we'll look back at the year's top stories. **Saints at Falcons FOX 4 p.m.** | A family feud: The QBs—New Orleans's Aaron Brooks and Michael Vick—are second cousins.

MONDAY 29

In Stores: *Beneath the Surface* by Michael Phelps | In an autobiography written with SI's Brian Cazeneuve, the 19-year-old who won six gold medals in Athens, speaks about his initial fear of water, his struggle with ADHD and his older sister's dashed Olympic dream.

TUESDAY 30

Army vs. Navy: Dec. 7, 1996, ESPN Classic 5 p.m. | As President Clinton and 69,237 others looked on in a relentless, freezing rain, the Cadets overcame a 21–3 deficit to win 28–24. It was the biggest comeback in the 114-year-old series, which resumes on Dec. 4.

WEDNESDAY 1

No. 2 Wake Forest at No. 6 Illinois ESPN 7 p.m. | Great guards galore. The Demon Deacons' Chris Paul was a preseason All-America, while Deron Williams and Dee Brown give the Illini a top backcourt. **Happy Birthday!** | Hall of Fame golfer Lee Trevino turns 65.

THURSDAY 2

Women's College Basketball: No. 6 Duke at No. 1 Tennessee ESPN2 7:30 p.m. | Without Alana Beard, the second overall pick in the 2004 WNBA draft, the Blue Devils will look to Monique Currie (12.3 points per game last year) as they try to upset the Lady Vols.

ALAN DIAZ/AP (WADE); MIKE EHRMANN/WIREIMAGE.COM (BROOKS); DAVID BERGMAN/CORBIS (ARMY); THAD PARSONS/ICON SMI (DUKE); LENNY IGNELZI/AP (TREVINO); MEL LEVINE (BIRTHDAY HAT); WWW.SPORTSPUBLISHINGLLC.COM (PHELPS BOOK); MICHAEL MARTIN/ICON SMI (DRUM MAJOR)

Under Review

"You've got to be a little crazy, a little obsessed, to plunge into rivers like these," the narrator says in *Expeditions to the Edge: Rampaging River* (National Geographic Channel, Nov. 30, 8 p.m.). Indeed. Tibet's Tsangpo River makes the Colorado River look like a babbling brook. The Tsangpo comes roaring out of the Himalayas, churning 50,000 cubic feet of water per second, with waves that reach 20 feet. At least that's how it was when four kayakers, supervised by Wick Walker, a former Army Special Forces officer, set off down the 140-mile-long gorge. Not all will survive, we are told at the outset of *Expeditions*, and the ensuing suspense—plus spectacular scenery, interviews and re-creations of horrendous spills into the savage waters—propels the one-hour program. Very little goes as planned on the trip: Water levels reach "epic proportions"; topographical maps show gradual descents that turn out to be monstrous drops; one man wipes out and loses his kayak, only to find days later that it's been rescued by herders who would like to be paid for their troubles. Forty-pound kayaks loaded down with 100 pounds of gear become increasingly difficult to maneuver, and as one of the kayakers acknowledges, his words both ominous and prescient, "Any small slip of control could mean a fatality." —*Nancy Ramsey*

WHO WILL BE THE NEXT
Sports Illustrated
PLAYER OF THE YEAR?

GO TO
si.com/POY
and tell us who you think SI should pick for Motor Sports.

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New Order in the Football World

Don Banks Takes an NFL Draft Do-Over

If we knew then what we know now, the NFL's 2004 draft would look oh so different. Call it revisionist history, but we're doing the picking all over again today. This is the way things should have gone on April 24.

1. Giants, Ben Roethlisberger, QB We're starting with a trade, but not the one from draft day. We've got the No. 1 Chargers and No. 4 Giants swapping places for this reason: If San Diego knew quarterback **Drew Brees** was going to play as well as he has, it wouldn't have sunk that money into **Philip Rivers**. Give the Giants Roethlisberger *(left)*, who's doing it now, and let someone else roll the dice on **Eli Manning**.

2. Raiders, Roy Williams, WR Tackle **Robert Gallery** is fine, but the Raiders love speed guys, and Williams has been the draft's most impressive receiver. With him, Oakland would be loaded at a position that would allow the vertical passing game **Al Davis** loves.

3. Cardinals, Eli Manning, QB **Dennis Green** didn't want to take a franchise quarterback at No. 3 the first time around. But considering how much he had to pay receiver **Larry Fitzgerald**, he should have.

4. Chargers, Robert Gallery, OT With Brees holding the fort, the Chargers can afford to address their sorry state of affairs at offensive tackle. Gallery hasn't wowed people in Oakland yet, but he's going to be a 10-year starter for somebody.

5. Redskins, Philip Rivers, QB Have you seen **Mark Brunell** and **Patrick Ramsey**'s less-than-passing impressions of a quarterback? If the Redskins chose Rivers, he could've faced Philadelphia last Sunday.

6. Browns, Jonathan Vilma, LB We'll let the Browns trade places with the Lions again. Given Cleveland's situation at linebacker, Vilma, who has been a man in the middle for the Jets, is too good to pass up.

▶Read Don Banks's NFL Insider, Mailbag and Banks' Shots every week at SI.com/nfl.

Luke Winn's Updated Heisman Watch

1. Jason White, QB, Oklahoma It was White's to lose heading into the weekend. And he didn't lose it—he still hasn't thrown an interception since Oct. 16—but his grip has loosened.

2. Alex Smith, QB, Utah He's too selfless to want this award anyway. "This team was so prepared for this moment," Smith told *The Salt Lake Tribune* after beating BYU. "Total team effort."

3. Cedric Benson, RB, Texas Can you really penalize a guy for his team being idle—especially when he's five spots ahead of a certain OU freshman in the national rushing standings?

4. Adrian Peterson, RB, Oklahoma With his 10th 100-yard game of the season, Peterson tied the record held by Wisconsin's **Anthony Davis** for most games over the century mark as a freshman.

▶College sports editor Luke Winn posts his Heisman Watch every Sunday at SI.com/football/ncaa.

The Poll Position

Whom should SI choose as its NASCAR driver of the year?

○ Kurt Busch ○ Jimmie Johnson ○ Jeff Gordon ○ Dale Earnhardt Jr.

Vote at **SI.com/poy**. *SI will name its driver of the year in next week's issue.*

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Faces in the Crowd

Morten Jensen

TANAGER, NORWAY > Soccer

Jensen, a senior forward at Dowling College, set a school single-season record of 26 goals, eight of them game-winners. He also had 15 assists and 67 points. He led the Golden Lions to the NCAA Northeast Regional title and was New York Collegiate Athletic Conference player of the year.

Donja Bobbitt

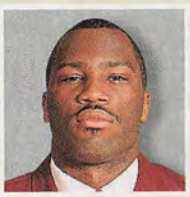
SAN ANTONIO > Volleyball

Bobbitt, a senior outside hitter at Presbyterian College, had 11 digs and a match-high 19 kills in a four-game win over Lenoir-Rhyne College, giving the Lady Blue Hose the 2004 South Atlantic Conference tournament championship. She was named the tournament's most valuable player.

Katie Pettigrew

FARMINGTON, N.MEX. > Soccer

Pettigrew, a senior forward at Luther College, set an NCAA Division III career record for goals (124) and points (297). Playing with pneumonia, she scored three goals in a 5–0 victory over Buena Vista University to give the Norse the Iowa Conference championship.



Chinedu Okoro

CHICAGO > Football

Okoro, a reserve junior quarterback at Tuskegee, completed 15 of 26 passes for 301 yards and threw three touchdowns to give the Golden Tigers a 41–15 win over Kentucky State and a trip to the Pioneer Bowl. He was named Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference player of the week.

Sarah Smith

LYNDEN, WASH. > Cross-country

Smith, a freshman at Pacific, ran a 6,000-meter course in 22:26.80 to win the NCAA Division III West Regional by 22 seconds. On Oct. 30 she set a school and course record of 21:25.80 to become the first freshman to win the Northwest Conference title.

Andy Santerre

HARRISBURG, N.C. > Auto Racing

Santerre, 36, drove his Chevrolet to a fifth-place finish at the MBNA America 150 at Dover International Speedway and clinched his third straight NASCAR Grand National, Busch North Series Championship. He is third on the alltime series win list with 21 career victories.

To submit a candidate for Faces in the Crowd, go to **SI.com/faces.**

FROM TOP: JIM LUZZI; CAROLINA SPORTS INC.; CHIP PETERSON; JOE OLIVEIRA; BLAKE TIMM; MICHAEL T. MYERS

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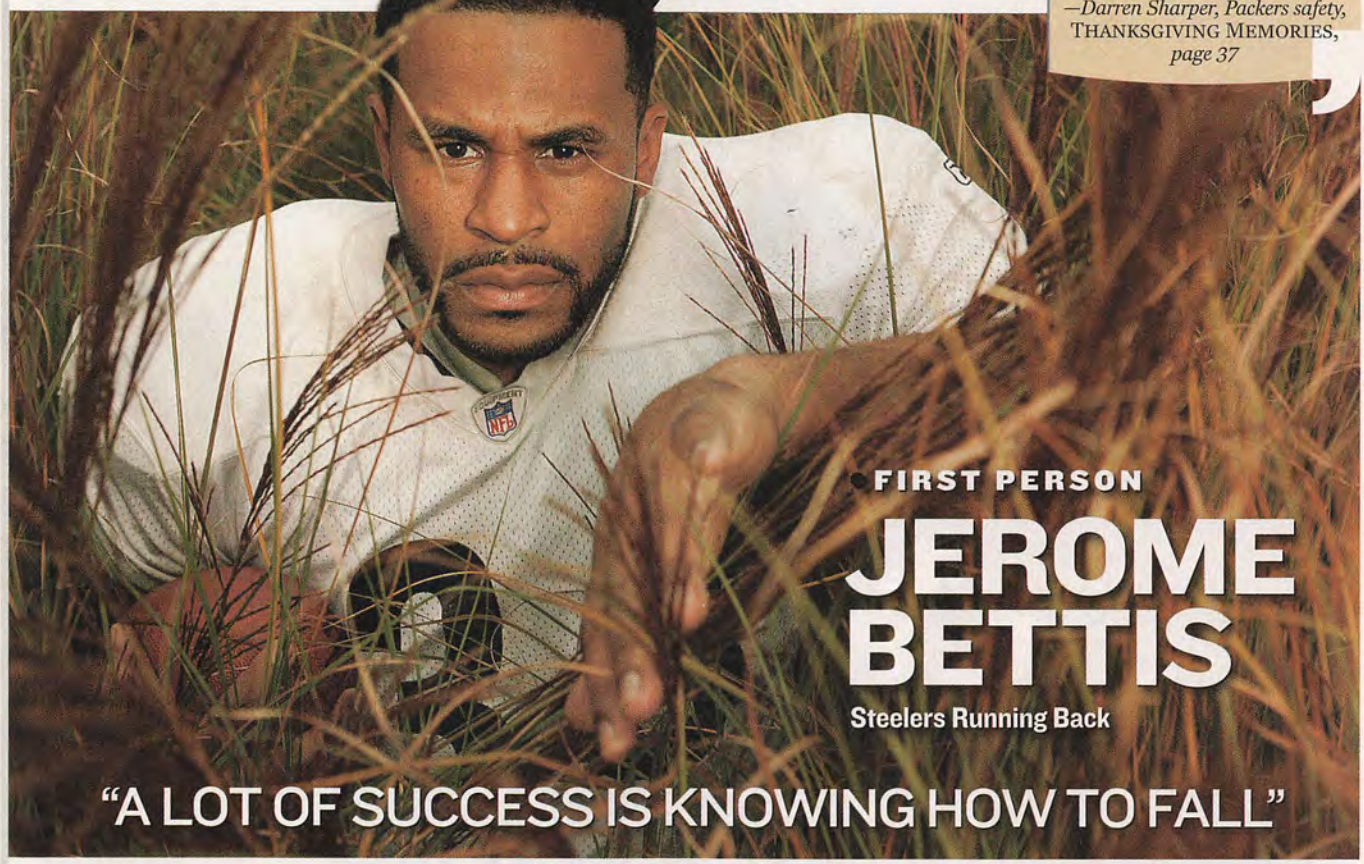
SI Players

Edited by
KOSTYA KENNEDY

"We had to play with a frozen turkey. You couldn't throw it."

—Darren Sharper, Packers safety, THANKSGIVING MEMORIES, *page 37*



FIRST PERSON

JEROME BETTIS

Steelers Running Back

"A LOT OF SUCCESS IS KNOWING HOW TO FALL"

• **ON LOOKING AT THE ALLTIME RUSHING LIST AND SEEING HIS NAME AHEAD OF JIM BROWN'S** I say, 'Yeah, right.' I mean, really. Let's be serious. I've studied running backs, and he's the god of running backs. Then I think, Not bad for a fat kid from Detroit who was supposed to be a fullback.

• **ON THE SECRET TO HIS SUCCESS** I'm a tailback in a fullback's body. For a long time, nobody wanted to recognize that. Early in my career it pissed me off to be thought of as just a hunk of blubber who can run through walls.

• **ON THE SECRET TO LASTING 12 YEARS AS A 255-POUND BACK** A lot of it is knowing how to fall. I know not to fall right on the ball when I go down hard, so I've never broken a rib. I know not to fall right on a shoulder, so I've never had a separated shoulder. I've been tackled 3,300 times. It's like when you see three guys coming at you, don't get nailed by all three. Try to have just one hit you. I've been able to elude the major, major injury.

• **ON WHAT HURTS TODAY** That's a long list. My neck's sore. My shoulders are tight. That tightness extends to the middle of my back. The right side under my ribs is tender. I've hyperextended both knees, so I'm icing them. My left Achilles is sore. For me, it's normal for this point in the season.

• **ON WHAT DRIVES HIM** Every week, I know there's a team on the other side of the ball, 11 guys, trying to stop me. I've always had the bull's-eye on my head, ever since I stepped into this league. If I don't have a good game, we lose. That's how I think. I live for that.

• **ON WHY HE LOVES BOWLING** You need mental toughness to be good at it. And you have to practice so hard and be consistent every time you practice to be good. The most pressure I ever felt in sports was at a bowling tournament in Muskegon, Mich., in 1995, standing there, ready to throw the last ball in a perfect game. Professional bowlers were there, watching me. A photographer was there, shooting pictures with a flash. I made the strike and got the perfect game. That's one of my proudest achievements.

• **ON BEING COMMISSIONER FOR A DAY** I'd try to get a team in the hands of minority ownership. Basketball's done it. Baseball's done it. In this age of sports one of 32 NFL teams needs to be owned by a minority. It's time. And it has to be a forced issue by the commissioner.

• **ON WHAT ATHLETES HE'D PAY TO SEE** A toss-up. I'd pay to see LeBron and Kobe square off. I'd pay to see Curt Schilling or the Big Unit pitch. *—As told to Peter King*

BETTIS, 32, LEADS THE STEELERS WITH 10 TDS THIS YEAR. PITTSBURGH (9–1) HOSTS WASHINGTON (3–7) ON SUNDAY

NFL/WIREIMAGE.COM (SHARPER); IDEUCE3 PHOTOGRAPHY (BETTIS)

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WHO'S Hot

Eagles

McNabb is on his way to best-ever season for a Philly quarterback, TO leads the NFC in touchdown (13) and *Housewife* (1) receptions, and with the Broad Street Bullies locked out, the City of Brotherly Love is behaving splendidly for its 9–1 footballers. The faithful even have a website, "Fans helping Fans," through which needy Eagles boosters can borrow money.

Drews

Bledsoe *(right)* threw three TDs to keep Bills' slim playoff hopes alive. Brees (226 passing yards) won in Oakland. Henson went 6 for 6 in Cowboys debut, and Barrymore's film *Fever Pitch* is getting timely rewrite so it can surf wave of Bosox Series win.

Panthers

Finally, defending NFC champs are getting into the spirit of the season: back-to-back wins while several team members—including WR Keary Colbert and DE Mike Rucker—have spent off days building homes for needy Carolinians.

Lamont Jordan

How does a fourth-year running back with 1,051 career yards get noticed on a team with Curtis Martin—the sixth-leading rusher of all time? By running for 61 fourth-quarter yards in a Jets comeback three weeks after gaining 115 on *MNF*. Jordan, a free-agent-to-be, may be holding key to the mint.

Ohio State

Forget Clarett. Buckeyes (7–4) salvage season by beating rival Michigan 37–21 before a joyous 105,456. "It feels like we're undefeated!" said CB Dustin Fox. On Sunday the school's two NFL receivers Joey Galloway (Bucs) and Michael Jenkins (Falcons) went 2–0.

WHO'S Not

Raiders

Not even a bye week could cure Silver and Black blues; they lost for second time in three weeks to downstate rival Chargers. Oakland (3–7) is now 7–19 since '02 Super Bowl. The Al Davis *(left)* team did debut "Raiders auf Deutsch"—a German-language section of Raiders.com, which already has Spanish and Chinese links. Note to content providers: Look up *schrecklich*.

Hasselbecks

Seattle's Matt missed first start in two years with thigh injury. Washington's Tim can't get off the bench despite Redskins ongoing QB woes and big loss to Eagles. And Tim's wife, Elisabeth, was visibly shaken after being berated, on-air, by *The View* cohost Star Jones for rearranging seating cards at Jones's wedding.

Bears

Chicago's football team lost its leader (LB Brian Urlacher) and then its dignity (to the Colts, 41–10). Things are worse in Maine, where NCAA Black Bears hockey is mediocre 5–4 at home and citizens voted to allow baiting of bears so the animals could be shot.

David Carr

When is it *not* a good thing to be named one of PEOPLE's Sexiest Men Alive? When grizzled NFL types have already been hanging the pretty boy QB label on you and scouts are doubting your technique. Besides, when you throw for just 164 yards and your Texans lose their third straight, well, that's a turn-off.

Ohio

Browns lose at home to Jets (forget the playoffs, Cleveland), Bengals lose at home to Steelers (forget the playoffs, Cincy), and Ohio University's lone alumnus in NFL—Ravens punter David Zastudil—is sidelined with separated shoulder.

SI PLAYERS POLL

[Based on a survey of 354 players]

For complete results and a breakdown of the poll go to SI.com/scorecard.

Who is the hardest player to tackle in the NFL?

- **Dante Hall** ..... **22%** *Chiefs, WR-KR*
- Jamal Lewis ..... 22% *Ravens, RB*
- LaDainian Tomlinson ..... 10% *Chargers, RB*
- Michael Vick ..... 6% *Falcons, QB*

FAST FACTS: Hall, the NFL's second-leading punt returner, was the only wide receiver among the 18 players receiving multiple votes. . . . Vick and Steve McNair (1%) were the only QBs in that group. . . . SI Players' cover guy Jerome Bettis finished sixth (5%).

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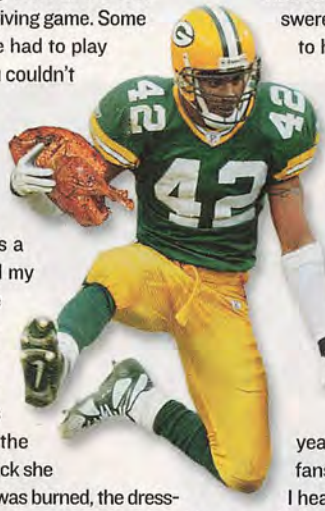
● HEARTWARMING TALES

Thanksgiving Memories

Remember the perfect holidays of years gone by? Neither do we. But we do recall the turkeys.

"MY UNCLE had one of the flyest trucks in town," says Vikings running back **Onterrio Smith** *(left)* who grew up in Sacramento. "On Thanksgiving when I was about seven his girlfriend was going to the store, and all the kids were trying to jump in the truck. I was all dressed up and I slipped. My arm got caught under the wheel, and his girlfriend took off and ran over my arm. I go in the house—I just got injured. But my uncle still whipped me with a hanger because we were trying to jump in the back of his truck, and we could have messed it up." . . . Green Bay safety **Darren Sharper** *(right)* recalls when the Grinch struck one holiday early. "I was in Little League football, eight or nine years old, and somebody stole all the footballs before our Thanksgiving game. Some crackhead probably. We had to play with a frozen turkey. You couldn't throw it. All you could do was run the ball. It was option all day long." . . . Sharper's teammate, receiver **Robert Ferguson**, says, "When I was a freshman in high school my grandma burned all the food. Her name is Big Momma. That's her real name. If you call her Louise, she might cuss you out. We all went to the park, and when we got back she was sleeping. The turkey was burned, the dressing was burned. The corn, the yams. All we could eat was potato salad and sweet potato pie. I wasn't laughing then. I was hungry." . . . In Baltimore veteran players traditionally pass out fliers to newcomers for a bogus turkey promotion. The dupes then drive 20 miles from the training complex in Owings Mills to Westminster, Md., and find . . . nothing. "They got me good," says receiver **Randy Hymes**. "I wanted a fried turkey. Me and [safety] Chad Williams drove all the way out there, and there was no turkey." . . . Washington cornerback **Shawn Springs** *(right)* used to visit his grandmother in Virginia on Thanksgiving. "We would play the Turkey Bowl. There were no rules. The year I was 17, I was playing quarterback, and my cousin, who was about 30, hit me so hard he almost killed me. I was like, I never want to be a quarterback again. I played defense the rest of the day." . . . Vikings cornerback **Antoine Winfield** remembers his days in Buffalo when "we told the rookies we were doing a charity event. The rookies got turkeys and delivered them to this house. We had hired a stripper, so a naked lady answered the door. When the rookies tried to hit on her, we videotaped it." . . . While with the Bengals in 2000, Bills linebacker **Takeo Spikes** *(below right)* invited 12 teammates for Thanksgiving, then repulsed them by serving barbecued raccoon. Said Spikes: "Tastes like brisket." . . . Finally, Packers center **Grey Ruegamer** recalls the Thanksgiving spirit of 1994 when his Arizona State Sun Devils played at Arizona. "My freshman year. I'm not playing, but I've got a jersey on. The fans are talking a lot of crap, and all of a sudden I hear, 'Hey, number 51, you suck. You don't even play.' I turn around, and this old lady is shaking a Power Bar at me. I start jabbering back. I turn back around and get hit in the head with a Power Bar. I turn around again, and she's waving a finger at me. This lady probably was 65. I picked up the Power Bar, took a bite out of it and threw it. Boom! I hit the dude next to her. The whole section got pissed off, and I had to move down to the other end of the bench."

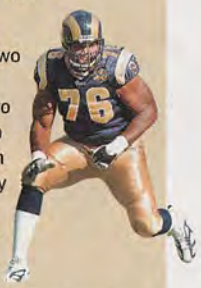


The Questions with Orlando Pace

Rams Tackle

What was your welcome-to-the-NFL moment? As a rookie with the Rams I went to dinner at Ruth's Chris Steak House with eight or nine veterans. They're ordering Cristal and not really drinking it and ordering all this food and not really eating it. Luckily they only had three or four lobsters left in the restaurant. I'm just sitting at the table shaking my head. Then they handed me the bill, more than five grand, and said, "Welcome to the NFL."

Most treasured possession? My Super Bowl ring. I keep it in a safe in my house.



Favorite off day activity? I have two sons, Justin and Jalen. They're two and four. I end up playing with them all day. Kids today have really good toys, so it can be pretty fun. My oldest is into Spider-Man, so he'll run around with the Spider-Man gloves on, and I'll play the bad guy.

If I weren't in the NFL I'd be . . . A fireman. As a child I was in awe of fire trucks. Besides, those guys are heroes. Who doesn't want to be a hero?

Last Week

Pace and the Rams were beaten 37–17 in Buffalo

This Week

Rams play in Green Bay on Monday night; they've won three straight on *MNF*.

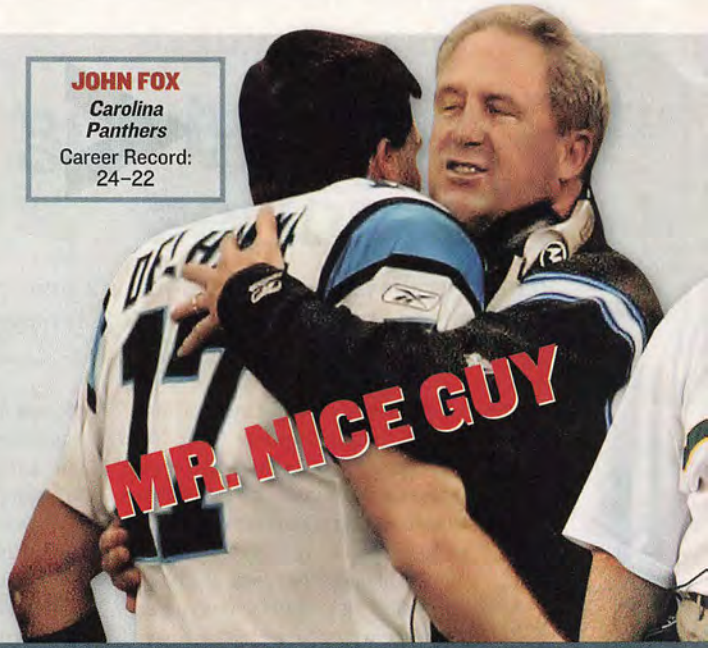
ELSA/GETTY IMAGES (PACE); STEVEN MURPHY/WIREIMAGE.COM (PACE ON FIELD); TOM UHLMAN/AP (SPIKES); JOE MCDONALD/CORBIS (RACCOON); CORBIS SYGMA (BIG MOMMA); JOHN BIEVER (SHARPER); BRITT ERLANSON/GETTY IMAGES (TURKEY); BETTMANN/CORBIS (VAN DOREN); DAVID E. KLUTHO (SMITH); BOB LEVERONE/TSN/ICON SMI (SPRINGS); SIEGLE PREIS/CORBIS (HAT); DONNA MCWILLIAM/AP (GOMEZ WITH TURKEY)

• COACHING STYLES

Is Crankier Better?

What NFL players look for in their leaders

THERE ARE many ways to motivate 53 well-fed men, and the NFL coaching ranks, like Gaul, can be divided into three parts: On one end you have sourpusses like the Cowboys' Bill Parcells and the Giants' Tom Coughlin. (Terry Bradshaw on Coughlin: "He is mean and hateful.") At the other you have sweethearts like the Panthers' John Fox and the Colts' Tony Dungy. (Indy tight end Marcus Pollard: "After games we've lost . . . he basically gives us the same speech as if we had won.") And you have a lot of guys in between, like the Packers' Mike Sherman. Whom would you rather play for? Some NFL veterans weigh in.

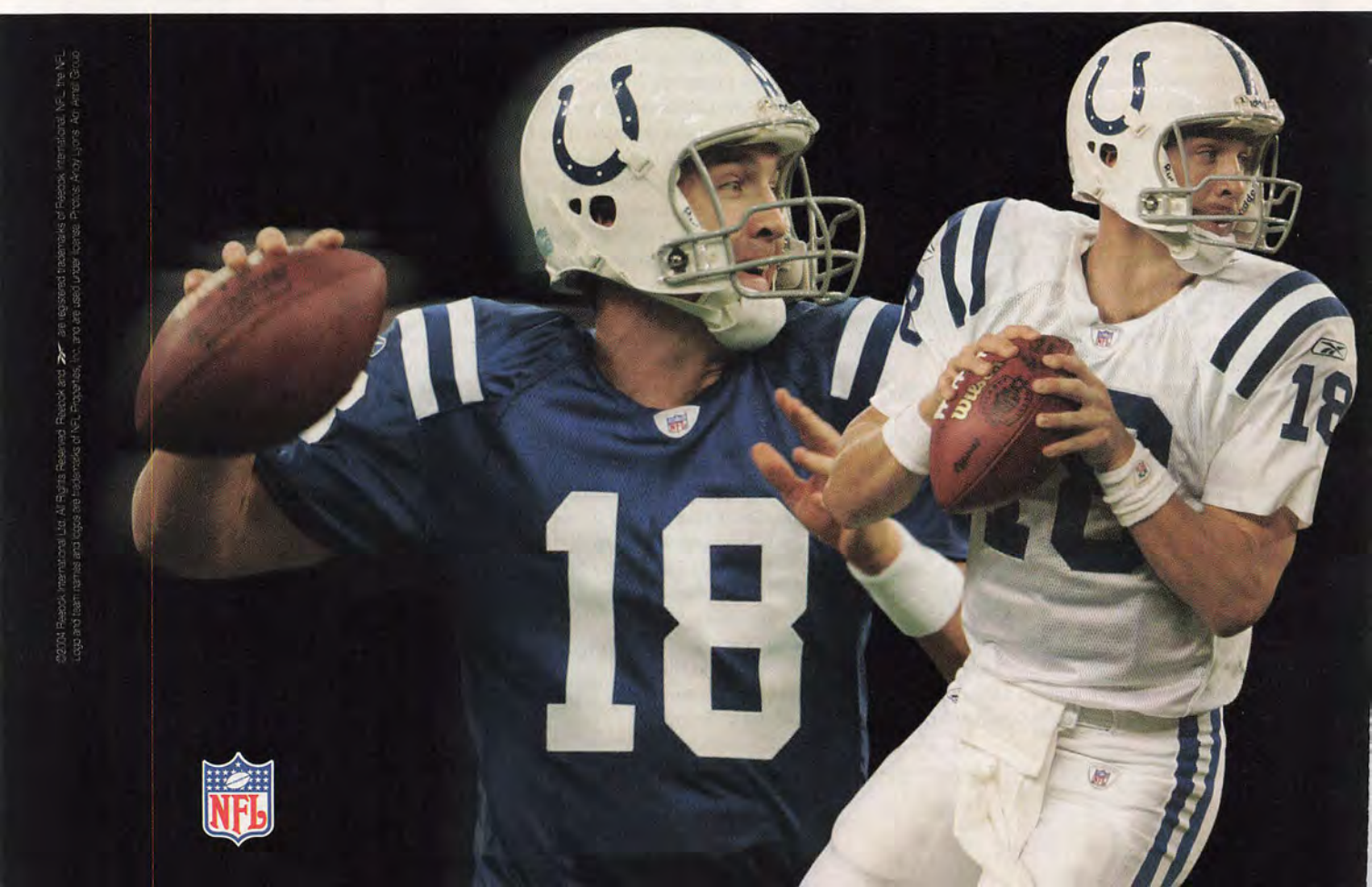


JOHN FOX
Carolina Panthers
Career Record: 24–22

TIM BROWN, *Buccaneers Wide Receiver* "I personally don't like to hear coaches yelling and screaming. I can remember my second year in the league [1989]. It was Fred Biletnikoff's first year as receivers coach of the Raiders; I ran the wrong route, and I knew I ran the wrong route. He dog cursed me like you couldn't believe. I had tears in my eyes, man. I didn't say anything for the rest of the practice. Then afterward I went up to him very kindly and said, If you ever want to get anything out of me, don't talk to me like that. My daddy doesn't talk to me that way. What I'm saying to you is, If we're going to work together, I cannot deal with that kind of treatment. That's the first and only time it ever happened. It's just a matter of respect."

JEREMY SHOCKEY, *Giants Tight End* "I had a tough coach in college [at Miami], so I learned what boundaries to cross and when to cross them. When you have a tough coach, you go about your business the same way, you prepare the same way. People might be walking on eggshells or something, but they learn to adjust."

KEVORK DJANSEZIAN/AP (FOX); PIERRE DUCHARME/REUTERS (SHERMAN); TONY GUTIERREZ/AP (PARCELLS); G. NEWMAN LOWRANCE/WIREIMAGE.COM (HARTINGS); JAMES D. SMITH/ICON SMI (GLENN); JERALD PINKUS/WIREIMAGE.COM (SHOCKEY);



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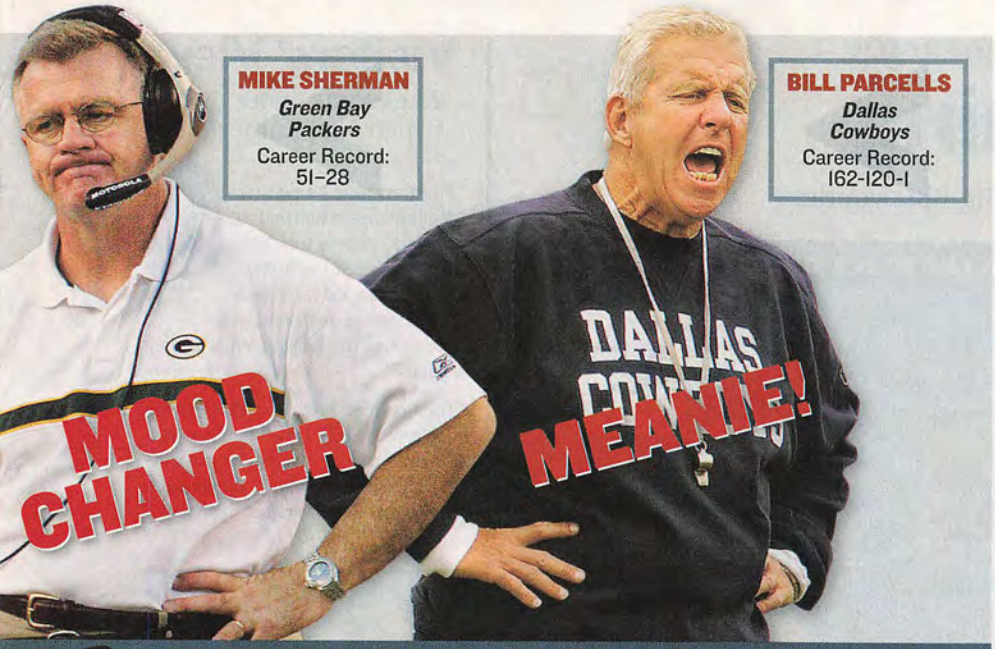

MIKE SHERMAN
Green Bay Packers
Career Record: 51–28

BILL PARCELLS
Dallas Cowboys
Career Record: 162–120–1

TERRY GLENN, *Cowboys Wide Receiver*
"A younger guy might need a Coach Parcells–type to get the best out of you. When you've got somebody on you all the time the way Coach Parcells is, it makes you feel gratified. He makes you feel like you do stuff bad so much that when you do something good and he praises you, you feel excited like a little kid."

JEFF HARTINGS, *Steelers Center*
"You have to coach like you have 53 sons in the locker room. Would you scream and yell at your son all day? You won't have a good relationship. But if you don't discipline him at all, you won't have a good relationship either. He'll take advantage of you. You have to know when to be hard on the players and when to be their friend."

KIRBY LEE/WIREIMAGE.COM (BROWN); AP (EARTH, WIND & FIRE); NFL HEADSHOTS/WIREIMAGE.COM (MORELAND)

● **COOL NAME**

Earthwind Moreland

Patriots Cornerback

FOUR YEARS out of Georgia Southern, the 5′ 10″, 182-pound defender has been on six NFL teams and had a stint in NFL Europe. He latched on to New England's practice squad in September and got his first NFL start on Nov. 14 against the Bills. Now, about that name: "My mother was really into the band," says Moreland, 27, of the 1970s-era R&B group Earth, Wind & Fire. "Luckily, I think they're pretty good too—I really like their song *Reasons*. When I introduce myself to people, their first reaction is they can't believe it's a real name. After I assure them, the second question is, 'So what's your middle name? And fire?' My middle name is actually Chatavian. It doesn't mean anything. My mother just thought it sounded good: Earthwind Chatavian Moreland." —*Lisa Altobelli*

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Swamp Thing

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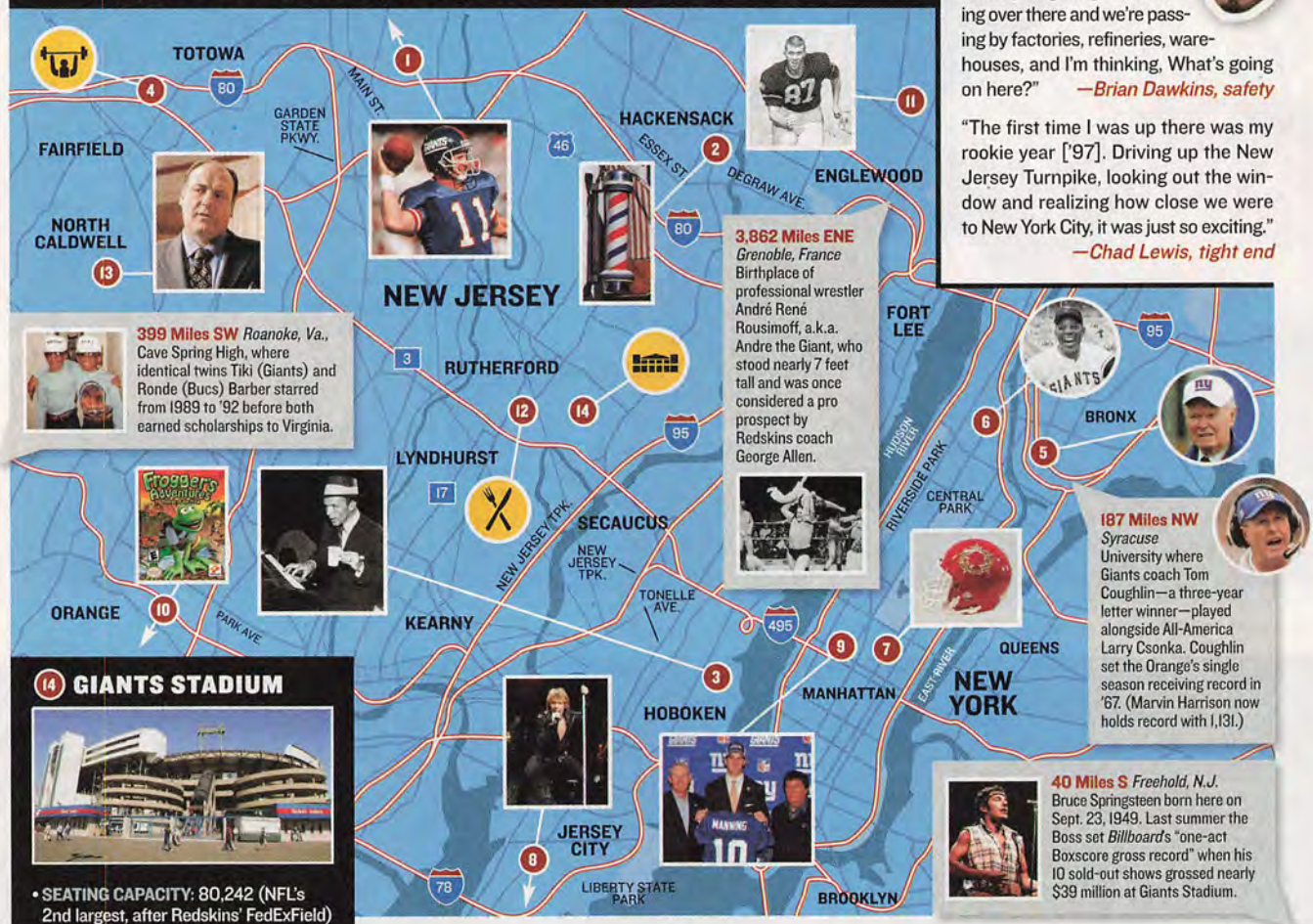
NOV. 28 >> PHILADELPHIA EAGLES AT N.Y. GIANTS >> 1 P.M. EST



399 Miles SW *Roanoke, Va.,* Cave Spring High, where identical twins Tiki (Giants) and Ronde (Bucs) Barber starred from 1989 to '92 before both earned scholarships to Virginia.

3,862 Miles ENE *Grenoble, France* Birthplace of professional wrestler André René Rousimoff, a.k.a. Andre the Giant, who stood nearly 7 feet tall and was once considered a pro prospect by Redskins coach George Allen.

187 Miles NW *Syracuse* University where Giants coach Tom Coughlin—a three-year letter winner—played alongside All-America Larry Csonka. Coughlin set the Orange's single season receiving record in '67. (Marvin Harrison now holds record with 1,131.)

40 Miles S *Freehold, N.J.* Bruce Springsteen born here on Sept. 23, 1949. Last summer the Boss set *Billboard*'s "one-act Boxscore gross record" when his 10 sold-out shows grossed nearly $39 million at Giants Stadium.

14 GIANTS STADIUM

- SEATING CAPACITY: 80,242 (NFL's 2nd largest, after Redskins' FedExField)
- ATTENDANCE RECORD: 82,948 for Pope John Paul II's mass, Oct. 5, 1995
- GIANTS' RECORD HERE: 129–100 (.563)
- JETS' RECORD HERE: 86-86-1 (.500)
- MILES TO TIMES SQUARE: 6.9
- GLATT KOSHER FOOD STANDS: 3
- RESIDENT GHOSTS: One. Ex–Teamsters union chief Jimmy Hoffa

Visitors' View

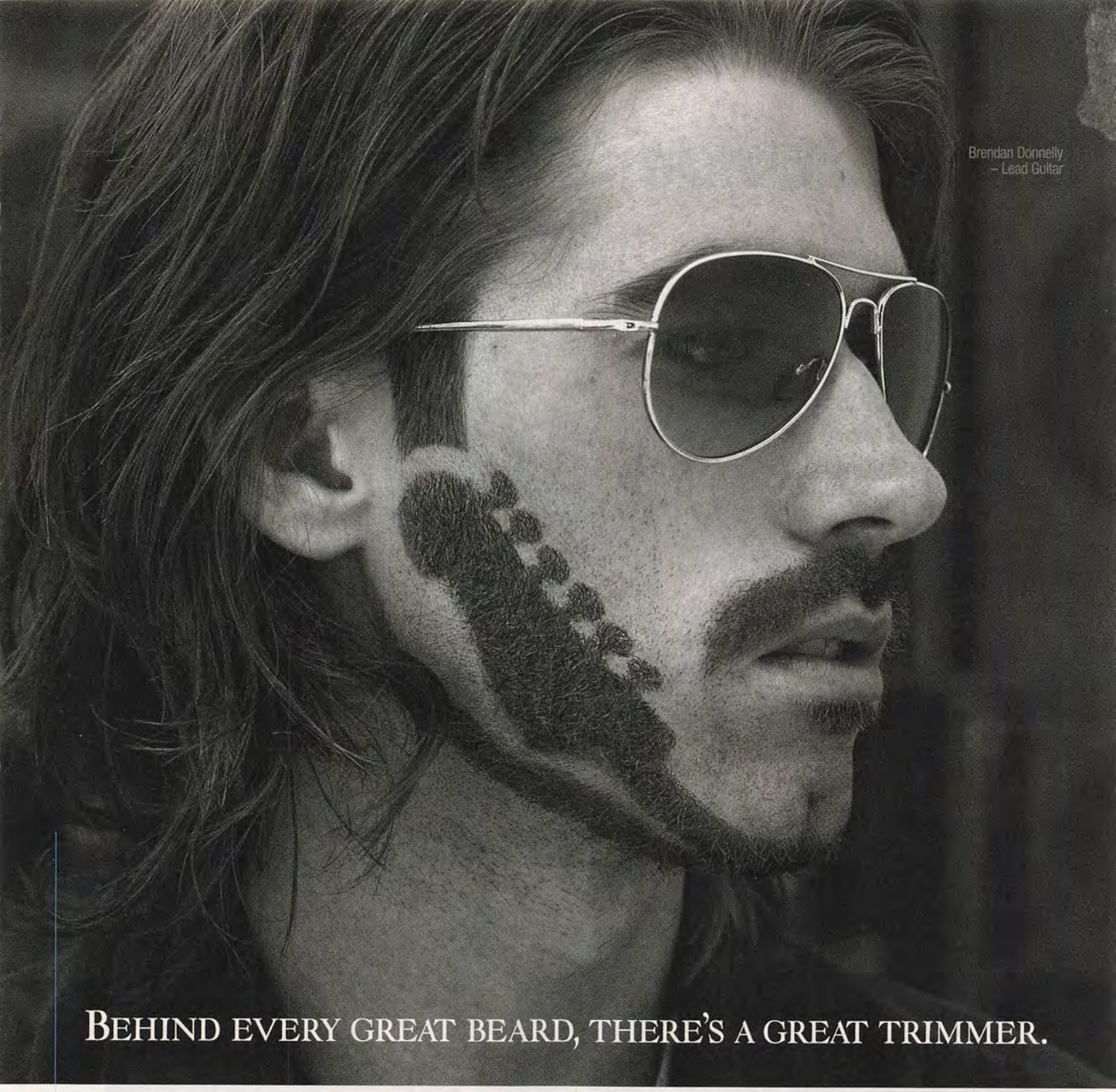
Eagles talk about their trip to East Rutherford

"The first time I saw the Meadowlands, it just had a real dark, gloomy feel. My rookie year [1996] we're driving over there and we're passing by factories, refineries, warehouses, and I'm thinking, What's going on here?" *—Brian Dawkins, safety*

"The first time I was up there was my rookie year ['97]. Driving up the New Jersey Turnpike, looking out the window and realizing how close we were to New York City, it was just so exciting." *—Chad Lewis, tight end*

[1] FRANKLIN LAKES Phil Simms's son Chris, now a Bucs QB, starred here at Ramapo High. "I married a New Jersey girl," the elder Simms once said, "and I venture to say I'm going to live here the rest of my life." **[2] CELEBRITIES** Barbershop run by Ollie Stancil, haircutter of choice for Giants since the '80s. Michael Strahan, Will Allen and Barrett Green go for the $15 Dark Caesar. **[3] HOBOKEN** Birthplace of Ol' Blue Eyes. **[4] GOLD'S GYM** Giants cornerbacks Allen and Will Peterson lift here, as does former Giants lineman Ron Stone (now with Raiders), who once took an advanced yoga class. Recalls gym manager Michael Picarelli, "A 300-pound dude pulling off a perfect yoga handstand, with a huge gold chain hangin' down. . . . That's a riot." **[5] YANKEE STADIUM** Giants home from 1956 to '73; during '58 NFL title game team VP Wellington Mara, the 42-year-old son of owner Tim Mara, took Polaroids from the press box and tossed them down to the bench in a weighted sock. Now every team uses aerial photography in games. **[6] POLO GROUNDS** Home of baseball's Giants from 1911 to '57, when the club went west. A housing project now occupies the site. **[7] TRUMP TOWER** Midtown skyscraper where, after the '83 season, New Jersey Generals owner Donald Trump signed Lawrence Taylor to a "futures contract" that would kick in when his Giants deal ended. Then Trump sold rights to the linebacker back to the Giants for a $750,000 profit. "I never thought Taylor should be in the USFL," Trump later said. "I had too much respect for him as a player." **[8] SAYREVILLE** Hometown of Jon Bon Jovi (né John Bongiovi), whose '88 album *New Jersey* sold more than five million copies. The rocker is close with former Giants assistant and current Pats coach Bill Belichick. On his 2002 album *Bounce*, Bon Jovi wrote to Belichick, "The song 'Bounce' is dedicated to you, my friend." **[9] MADISON SQUARE GARDEN** Self-proclaimed World's Most Famous Arena and longtime host of NFL draft. Last April top pick Eli Manning precipitated a trade from Chargers to Giants. **[10] MAJESCO INC.** Where Giants LB Wesly Mallard worked in '03 off-season. His job: testing (read: playing) Game Boy Advance titles like *Cartoon Network Speedway* and *Frogger Advance*. **[11] ENGLEWOOD HOSPITAL** On Aug. 22, 1941, Duane Charles Parcells, who would be called Bill because he was often mistaken for a local boy of that name, was born here. The coach grew up in Oradell, N.J., where he played football with Vince Lombardi Jr. **[12] POPEYE'S CHICKEN & BISCUITS** Giants equipment managers order from here for players, getting food tagged by jersey. (Number 75 Keith Hamilton's was "eight-piece all-white chicken with large beans and rice.") **[13] NORTH CALDWELL** Former stomping grounds of *Sopranos* creator David Chase and locale of the TV family's 6,000-square-foot villa. Tony Soprano (that is, actor James Gandolfini) goes to football games at Rutgers—his alma mater. *—Adam Duerson*

MAP BY STEVE STANKIEWICZ; ABBOT GENSER/HBO (GANDOLFINI); DAMIAN STROHMEYER (SIMMS); BONUS BOOKS (PARCELLS); DREW HALLOWELL/ICON SMI (DAWKINS); JACQUES M. CHENET/CORBIS (SPRINGSTEEN); CHRIS TROTMAN/GETTY IMAGES (COUGHLIN); NEIL LEIFER (MAYS); BILL KOSROUN/AP (MANNING); ETHAN MILLER/REUTERS (BON JOVI); AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES (STADIUM); AP (SINATRA); KONAMI (FROGGER'S ADVENTURES); COURTESY OF THE BARBER FAMILY (BARBERS); BETTMANN/CORBIS (ANDRE THE GIANT); JEFF ZELEVANSKY/ICON SMI (MARA); COURTESY OF COLLECTIVEANDSAVE.COM (HELMET)



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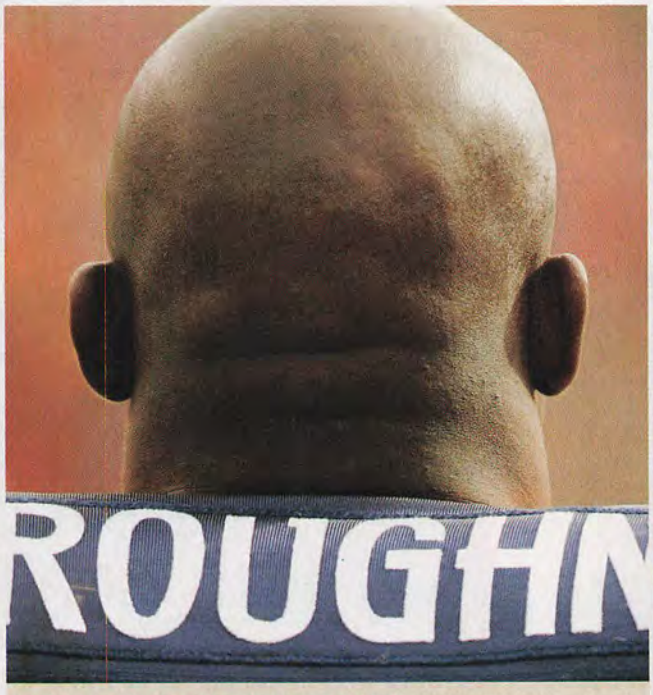
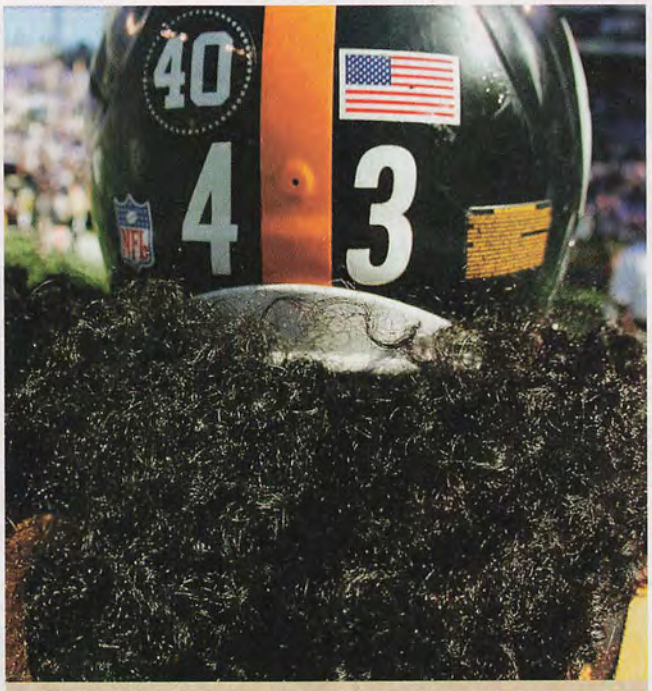
● HEAD CASES

What's Under My Helmet

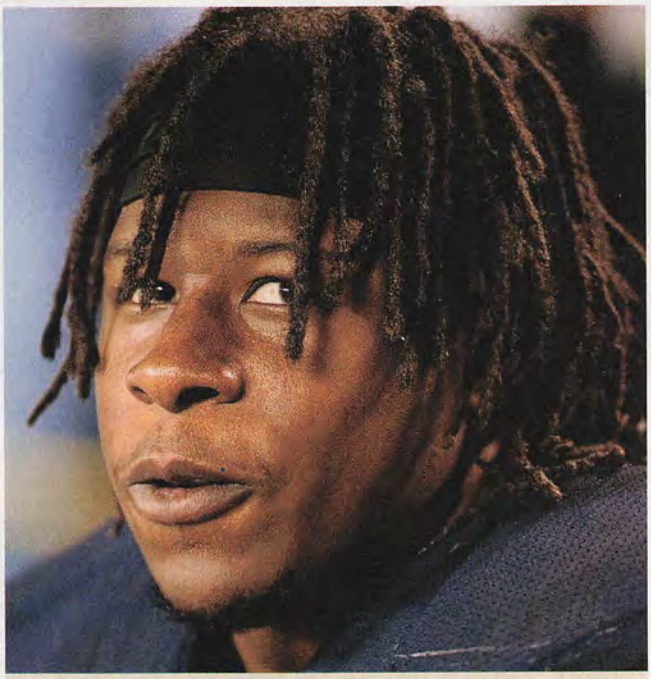


REUBEN DROUGHNS, *Broncos Running Back* "I've been shaving my head twice a week since my freshman year in high school. I do it myself. I do it every game morning or on Saturday night before the game. It makes me feel good and tough. It gives me that edge. I'll always shave my head."



TROY POLAMALU, *Steelers Safety* "I last cut my hair three years ago. Indirectly, it's part of my heritage—there are a lot of Samoans with really long hair. I don't worry about getting it yanked on the field. It would be the best hair pulling ever: They could pull my hair out on an interception."

RAY BUCHANAN, *Raiders Safety* "I fly a young lady in from Atlanta every other Friday to do my hair, retouch it, wash it. You want to keep dreadlocks clean, not let them mat up. I've had it this way since 2000. I had cornrows, and then my wife decided I would look pretty good in dreadlocks."



ADRIAN PETERSON, *Bears Running Back* Hasn't cut his hair since 2000 but occasionally gets it "retwisted" at a salon called Chic not far from the Bears' headquarters in Lake Forest. The process takes two to three hours. "I'm just letting it grow. When I get tired of it, then I'll cut it."

BRIAN BAHR/GETTY IMAGES (DROUGHNS); DOUG PENSINGER/GETTY IMAGES (POLAMALU); DAVID STLUKA/GETTY IMAGES (PETERSON); PETER READ MILLER (BUCHANAN)

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The Ugliest Game

An **NBA brawl** exposes the worst in player and fan behavior and serves as a frightening wake-up call

BY JACK McCALLUM

UNLESS YOUR gastrointestinal tract is immune to violence and bad taste—a distinct possibility given their abundance in society today—this was a week in sports that could turn your stomach. Rage, racism, sex, alcohol, possible lawsuits and felony charges: We touched 'em all, baby. And what followed the Terrell Owens–Nicollette Sheridan Towel Drop, the Lou Holtz Farewell Donnybrook and the Malice at the Palace Player-Fan Brawl (the nastiest incident in the NBA's 58-year history) was one of our sporadic sessions of head-scratching and soul-searching. What's happened to our games? What's gone wrong with our sporting culture? Aren't sports supposed to be something that kids can enjoy? Aren't they meant to entertain and even inspire us? ¶ It's impossible to say whether any major changes will come out of

POWER GRAB Ben Wallace's shove of Artest (above) soon led to Stephen Jackson's punching spree.

Sports Illustrated
ESPN
IND 97
DET 82
lemire: 33 pts, 14 reb

it all, though at week's end two things were clear. First, the ongoing criminal investigation of NBA players and fans after last Friday's fracas at the Palace *(page 50)*—not to mention the protracted battle shaping up between a league that imposed severe suspensions and a players' union that is appealing them—is guaranteed to keep the ugly episode in the news, further alienating the public. Second, the NBA now has a Christmas Day doubleheader that's just as titillating as the smash hit *Desperate Housewives*, which ABC was promoting with its lame *Monday Night Football* lead-in featuring Owens and Sheridan on Nov. 15. Gather 'round the TV, kids, for Game 1, the Detroit Pistons versus the Indianapolis Pacers at Indy's Conseco Fieldhouse, a rematch of the two teams at the epicenter of a fist-throwing, chair-launching, beer-hurling riot. And in Game 2 watch a showdown between the Los Angeles Lakers' Kobe Bryant, who recently had rape charges against him dropped, and the Miami Heat's Shaquille O'Neal, whom Bryant tarnished after his arrest when he told police that O'Neal had paid millions of dollars in hush money to women after sexual encounters (an accusation Shaq denies). Happy holidays!

Stern promised to reexamine arena security and to HOLD FANS ACCOUNTABLE for their "antisocial behavior." Both measures are a decade overdue.

In the wake of the 10-minute melee at the Palace, which he termed "an unprecedented fiasco," NBA commissioner David Stern has promised a reexamination of security at all 30 of his league's arenas. At a press conference on Sunday he also talked, though not in much detail, about "holding fans accountable for their antisocial behavior." Both measures are a decade overdue. With Friday's Fight Night, the league reached a new low—and in Detroit, too, where just five months ago the championship won by the team-first Pistons had engendered a fair measure of positive feeling across the sports world.

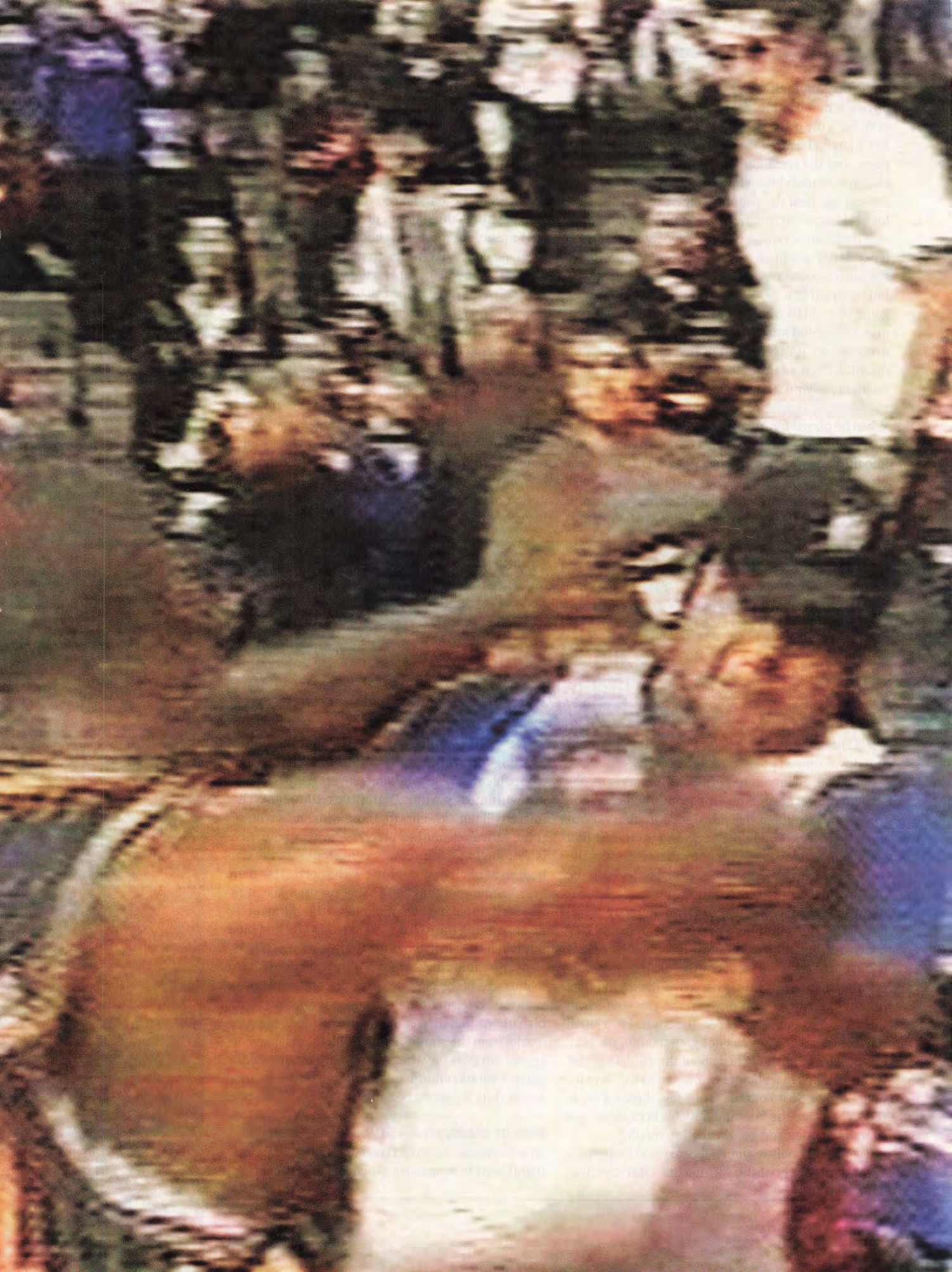
Worse for Stern, when a brawl broke out at the South Carolina–Clemson football game last Saturday afternoon—one that had players swinging at one another across half the field and required a phalanx of state policemen to break up—some of those involved cited the NBA as a factor. "For 24 hours [the players] watched that basketball fiasco on TV," said Clemson coach Tommy Bowden, whose team prevailed 29–7 in Holtz's last game in charge of the Gamecocks. "And that's on 24 hours a day, every major news program . . . and they watched it, watched it, watched it." (How watching it didn't teach them the dangers of such antics is perhaps better left to another discussion.) Soldiers and civilians fall in Fallujah, but punches at the Palace are adjudged almost as newsworthy. It's hardly a surprise that less than 48 hours after the Palace incident, a website called BasketBrawl.us was up and running.

In fact incidents of reprehensible behavior at sporting events go relatively unnoticed on a regular basis. Nebraska's Darren DeLone, a 6' 5", 315-pound senior tackle, has been charged with aggravated assault and battery after he allegedly drove his helmet into the face of a member of the Oklahoma spirit group before a Nov. 13 game in Norman. Adam Merritt, 19, required oral surgery as a result of the hit, which sent him flying eight feet into a brick retaining wall. But there are two sides to the story, which is usually the case in a sporting culture that must claim obnoxious and provocative fans right along with overreacting jocks. Merritt is a member of Oklahoma's Ruf/Neks, who typically sit in the end zone at Owen Field and shoot popguns and heckle opposing teams. That doesn't justify an assault by a heavily padded mesomorph, just as a thrown cup of beer doesn't make it O.K. for the Pacers' Ron Artest to leap into the stands in search of someone to cold-cock. But it is part of the discussion.

Plainly, the social contract that should govern our games has broken down, and not just in the NBA. Clemson running back Yusef Kelly actually sounded proud after last Saturday's debacle that "at least we kept it to the football teams." But is anyone naive enough to believe that alcohol-fueled football fans *wouldn't* get involved if they had NBA-like proximity to the field? Saturdays and Sundays are for rage in the stands and preening on the field, particularly in the NFL, where court jesters like Owens celebrate six-yard receptions as if they'd just won the lottery.

Baseball players, too, have frequently crossed that sacrosanct barrier between field and bleachers. Texas Rangers relief pitcher Frank Francisco was charged with felony assault (it was eventually dropped to misdemeanor assault; he pleaded not guilty) after throwing a chair at a heckler during a game in Oakland in September. Later that month Los Angeles Dodgers

NO RESTRAINT After being doused a second time by a fan at close range (above), Artest took a swing at a Pistons supporter who ventured onto the court.



outfielder Milton Bradley threw a bottle at a fan's feet, during a home game, drawing a five-game suspension. Were the players wrong in both cases? Absolutely. But a fan had heaved the bottle at Bradley in the first place, and the spectator whom Francisco went after said that he had chosen his season-ticket location because it was near the visitors' bullpen, the perfect spot for heckling—"an American tradition," as he put it.

A tradition of boorishness and a bent toward violence is not unique to the U.S. Before Friday night the most famous instance of a player's going after a fan occurred in a 1995 English First Division soccer game when Manchester United's Eric Cantona leaped over a fence and kung fu kicked a heckler in the chest, drawing an unprecedented suspension of eight months. Even as they lamented last Friday night's incident, any number of NBA players and coaches talked about experiences in Europe that were worse. When he played for Milan in the 1980s, Phoenix Suns coach Mike D'Antoni was spit upon when he went into the corner to pick up a loose ball for an inbounds play, then was hit with a technical foul after he yelled at the fan. "I played an awful lot of games in Europe where there were armed riot police with shields," says Chicago Bulls coach Scott Skiles. "People would spit down on you going out of the tunnel."

An NBA referee with 30 years' experience says that "some official in a major sport is going to get killed. You can see the craziness in the stands. YOU CAN FEEL IT."

Likewise, civility in today's NBA arenas is as absent as the set shot. Souvenir stands sell clackers, towels and thundersticks designed to distract opposing players. The home team is announced in a smoke-and-firecracker ceremony that resembles the arrival of a heavyweight fighter to do battle. With the blessing of the front office, yahoo public address announcers try to whip the crowd into a frenzy. Spectators risk life and limb when they lean over a balcony wrestling for a free T-shirt launched by a giant slingshot. And there is, of course, alcohol, not only beer but also mixed drinks served to the high rollers in the front row, who at most arenas can stretch out their legs and put both feet on the court. It's a small miracle that some fan has not gotten out of his seat, taken a charge, then bitched about the call. "The NBA wants the fans to feel more connected to us," says Indiana center Scot Pollard. "They feel there's a separation between the fans and athletes because we get so much money and get glorified so much."

Two nights before the Pacers arrived in Detroit, several members of the Minnesota Timberwolves complained about the particularly vile nature of the heckling at the Palace, where a month earlier, during a preseason game, a fan had thrown a bottle toward the Minnesota bench. An NBA referee with 30 years of experience honestly believes that "some official in a major sport is going to get killed. You can see the craziness in the stands. You can feel it." When every game features three hours of nonstop cacophony—loud music, dot races, fan shootouts, giveaways—the message conveyed in the arena is clear: The game does not matter. Fan satisfaction does. And so some spectators, nurtured at the teat of Jerry Springer, begin to believe that they are, in fact, part of the game. They hurl invective, then beer and feel frustrated that they can't get even more involved. Richard Jefferson of the New Jersey Nets says that he has heard fans ridicule a player for having a mentally handicapped child. *Dude, nothing wrong with that—I paid to get in.*

There is something else at work here, too, something that Indianapolis Colts coach Tony Dungy mentioned in connection with Owens and the desperate housewife. Dungy found the skit "racially offensive," saying that it played into black stereotypes "on the heels of the Kobe Bryant incident." Few connected with the NBA wanted to touch whether racism was kindling for the firestorm last Friday, but it was inescapable that black Indiana players were duking it out with mostly white Detroit ticket holders. That image will not sit well with those white fans who see some African-American players—lavishly paid, richly tattooed and supremely confident—as the embodiment of all that is wrong with sports. Has there ever been a more reviled U.S. team than last summer's Olympic basketball squad, which finished a disappointing third? They wore red, white and blue, but when they lost, what too many saw was black.

At the same time, some NBA players see, in the white faces of the fans, the embodiment of their frustrations: criticism from the media, the 24-hour sports blabathons that dissect their performances, racist remarks from the stands. Don't think there isn't widespread support for what Artest did. The theory that players should endure all manner of abuse without responding is just that—a theory. "Nobody gets paid

RAIN OF TERROR Rasheed Wallace (36) tried to stop the fracas, but it didn't end until Jermaine O'Neal (right) and his teammates exited in a deluge of trash.

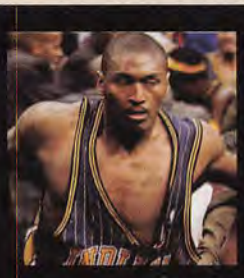
81
59 FINAL

The Eye of a Perfect Storm

With his hair-trigger temper and history of eruptions, Pacers All-Star forward Ron Artest was exactly the wrong person in the wrong place at the wrong time

THERE ARE countless scenarios under which the ugly outburst at the Palace of Auburn Hills could have been avoided. Pistons center Ben Wallace could have refrained from retaliating for a hard foul by Pacers forward Ron Artest with a violent shove to Artest's neck. The cup hurled by a fan that struck Artest in the chest could have missed its mark. And, of course, Artest could have chosen, upon being drenched by the cup's contents, not to storm into the stands, thereby precipitating a melee that included Indiana guard Stephen Jackson's wilding through the lower mezzanine, Detroit fans' getting decked after charging onto the court and a metal chair's flying head-high into a clutch of Pacers players.

Then again—and this is the scary part—maybe Artest *didn't* have that choice. All too often he appears to be basketball's version of the Incredible Hulk, morphing into a destructive alter ego and then having no memory of the transformation afterward. According to one source who tried to pull him away from the fans last Friday, Artest had a "wild and crazy look" in his eye and was growling and muttering as he left the court. Not long after, however, he was back to his normal, confoundingly genial self. Pacers radio announcer Mark Boyle, who made a futile attempt to tackle Artest as he charged into the stands, later encountered Artest as Boyle headed into the Indiana locker room with blood running from his temple and nose. "What happened to you?" Artest asked. Amazed, Boyle responded, "You ran me over, Ronnie, remember?" Artest, as always, apologized. "He had no idea," says Boyle.



Artest is basketball's version of the **INCREDIBLE HULK**, morphing into a destructive alter ego and then having no memory of the transformation.

In suspending Artest, 25, for the remainder of the season (including the playoffs) for what he described as actions that "wildly exceeded the professionalism and self-control" standards of the league, commissioner David Stern acknowledged that he had considered Artest's history of suspensions, 15 games missed in a seven-year career. In addition Artest was ordered to undergo anger counseling in 2002 after harassment and criminal contempt charges brought by the mother of two of his children were dropped; he smashed video monitors at Madison Square Garden in '03; and he recently made a bizarre request for time off because he was exhausted from, among other things, promoting a group on his music label and recording his own album. According to a source close to the team, his antics had worn so thin with many Indiana players that three days before the fight they complained en masse to management that he had become too much of a distraction. On Sunday, in a statement made through the players' association, Artest expressed regret for his behavior but said he found the punishment from Stern unfair; by missing 73 games he will forfeit $5 million of his $6.2 million salary.

The other two Pacers hit with hefty suspensions, Jackson (30 games) and forward Jermaine O'Neal (25), lack Artest's history. The 26-year-old Jackson, however, is known around the league as a hothead, and his behavior on Friday night may have been the most disturbing of all. From untucking his shirt to be better prepared to fight guard Lindsey Hunter—who declined Jackson's summons—to his dash into the stands not to grab Artest but to take a swing at a fan, he looked like a man itching for a fight. Even New Jersey Nets center Alonzo Mourning, who was quick to defend Artest, said, "Jackson is another story because his actions were way too uncalled for."

O'Neal, 26, was suspended for rushing across the court and dropping a fan with a vicious straight right hand. A team leader and solid citizen, he was an unlikely source of such violence. So, too, was the only Piston to receive a significant suspension: Wallace, who got six games. Big Ben's excessive reaction to Artest's foul in the last minute of the game was, in the words of Hunter, "totally out of character."

The players' suspensions aside, nine people involved in the fracas were treated for minor injuries; five of them were taken to the hospital, where they were treated and released. The Auburn Hills police investigation is expected to take two to three weeks to complete, after which Oakland County prosecutors will decide whether to file criminal charges, which could range from misdemeanor assault and battery for those who threw punches to felony assault for the fan who hurled the chair. On Monday the police said that they had identified the man who tossed the cup at Artest and that it was not the fan whom Artest initially went after. The father of that fan, Mike Ryan, said on Sunday that his son is considering legal action. No doubt others will follow.

Then, too, there are the basketball ramifications to consider. Indiana will be able to put Artest, Jackson and O'Neal on the suspended list and sign three players to take their places, but unless one of those three is Karl Malone and another Michael Jordan—neither of whom is likely to join the Pacers—it is going to be a long, rough stretch for a team that was in position to win the Eastern Conference. (The question of what will happen to the $11 million in salary that the Pacers will not have to pay Artest, Jackson and O'Neal has yet to be resolved.) And while all the Indiana players are appealing their suspensions, the same small, bespectacled man who dealt them out is expected to hear those appeals, making any changes, shall we say, dubious.

The irony of all this is that the player who incited the riot—Artest—is precisely the sort of Bad Boy whom Detroit boosters have come to appreciate. He even switched his number this year to 91 as an homage to Dennis Rodman, the former Pistons provocateur. "He'd be the fans' favorite, I guarantee it," says Indiana rookie center David Harrison. "You hate him when he's not on your team, you love him when he is."

But now, because of a wrongheaded split-second decision, Artest will spend the next five months without any team at all. —*Chris Ballard*

to have stuff thrown at them unless they're circus clowns in a little booth," says Indiana center David Harrison. Pacers opponents have closed ranks too. "Hell, no, it's not Artest's fault," says Nets center Alonzo Mourning. "What has this come to, when a fan feels he has the right to throw something at a player on the court?" Adds New Orleans Hornets forward Lee Nailon, "If we were in the same situation, and somebody did something to my teammate, I would have been out there with them because it's family."

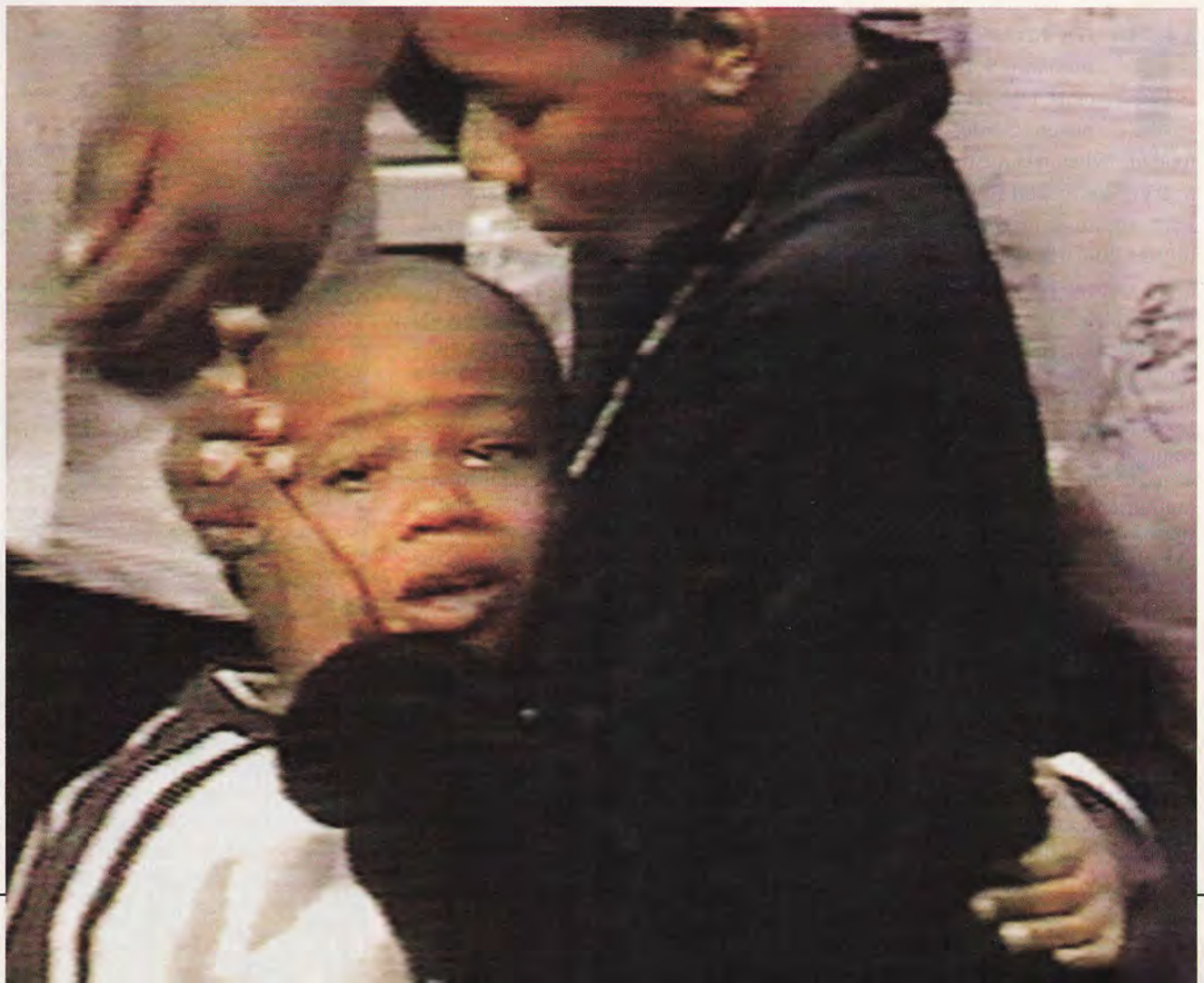
"If the fans throw something," says Timberwolves guard Sam Cassell, "we've got to protect our honor."

Players may fight one another on the court, but they always band together against fans and authority. In a league that suffers from massive image problems, the biggest NBA stories before last Friday were Minnesota's Latrell Sprewell, who makes $14.6 million a year, complaining during a contract dispute that he "has a family to feed," and Artest, who makes $6.1 million, asking for a month off to promote an R&B album for his fledgling label, TruWarier. (O.K., Ron, you've got the time now.) Those are two examples of incomprehensible stupidity, yet few players criticized Sprewell or Artest. Neither did many rally behind Stern's stern sentence, the reaction of Cleveland Cavaliers star LeBron James being typical. "It was shocking, and it's kind of sad, that some of our good players are suspended," said James. "To keep our image up, we kind of need those guys." With the collective-bargaining agreement expiring after this season, that sort of divide between labor and management hardly bodes well.

The actions and comments of the Artests and the Sprewells should not define an entire league. But to many they do. It's hard to imagine what kind of criticism Allen Iverson of the 76ers would take if he acted out during a game half as much as his fellow Philadelphian, Owens. Iverson is more of a target for angry white fans than Owens. Iverson is visible. He's close to them. They see his tats. They see his cornrows. They see his emotions. They see his blackness.

For too long Stern has soft-pedaled the serious problems in his league: the erosion of the players' fundamental skills, the influx of teenagers unprepared to be professionals, the emphasis on individual virtuosity over team play. Even if some of them are out of Stern's control, they are problems nonetheless. The review of arena procedures may turn out to be—indeed, *should* turn out to be—a watershed moment in American sports. Stern seems poised to act, but he also needs to see the big picture, perhaps convening a summit of the major sports to discuss issues such as security, player behavior, abusive fans, alcohol service at games and the provocative way that all sports are marketed. And while he's at it, he'd better get his own players onboard.

The image that may linger the longest from last Friday's mayhem was that of a young and fearful Pistons fan being consoled as he wept. The kid must be wondering where all the fun went. □



DUANE BURLESON/AP (ARTEST)

SAD STATE One young fan who witnessed the melee isn't likely to forget it soon. Nor is the public likely to forget his image.

The BCS Mess

The Bowl Championship Series is facing the same old problems—and a few new ones. How did it all go so wrong?

BY TIM LAYDEN

Illustration by Slim Films

THE NAME was an afterthought, devoid of inspiration. Bowl Championship Series. By the winter of 1998 a cluster of bowl game officials, television executives and conference commissioners had completed the most sweeping changes in the history of postseason college football. When it came time to give their creation a title, they were almost too tired to try. "We picked Bowl Championship Series because it was easy," says Big East commissioner Mike Tranghese. "The TV people mentioned other possibilities, but this was the simplest." ¶ It is simple no more. Six years later the words have been replaced by their initials—BCS—which are held up every autumn as a symbol of bureaucratic ineptitude, power-conference greed, lip service to academic ideals and pompous disregard for the public's hunger for a playoff. The BCS founders couldn't have imagined that websites would be created to trash their brainchild, that an entire genre of jokes would be spawned, that Congress would find time to belittle the BCS (as it did last year) or that one day a recruit would tell Utah's Urban Meyer, "Coach, I like your offense, I like your facilities, I like your school. But you're not in the BCS." The three letters have become shorthand for the moat that separates the wealthy in college football from the impoverished.

A year ago the system notoriously matched LSU and Oklahoma in its championship game, even though USC was ranked No. 1 in the AP and the ESPN/*USA Today* polls. The result was a split title, the very thing fans assumed the system would prevent. This year the BCS nears implosion again. USC, Oklahoma and Auburn are unbeaten, and there's a strong possibility they'll remain that way, guaranteeing that one worthy contender will be left out of the Orange Bowl, ostensibly the national championship game. Meanwhile a mediocre Boston College team (8–2 after beating Temple last Saturday) from the mediocre Big East needs one more win to earn an automatic spot in one of the BCS bowls. Payout: $14 million to $17 million.

Last Saturday, Utah's 52–21 win over Brigham Young virtually ensured that the undefeated Utes will finish in the BCS top six, becoming the first team from outside the Atlantic Coast, Big East, Big 12, Big Ten, Pac-10 and SEC to earn a place in one of the BCS games. In the aftermath of the Utes' victory, Meyer got a ride on fans'

GHOSTS IN THE MACHINE The big BCS computer is working overtime again this season, calculating new ways to baffle fans.

SOONERS
Cal
TEXAS

shoulders as he waved a sombrero, signifying a likely Fiesta Bowl invitation. The reasons to celebrate weren't all obvious. "Not long ago the NCAA legislated out the $750,000 free throw [by implementing revenue sharing for the NCAA basketball tournament]," said Utah athletic director Chris Hill three days before the Utes played BYU. "Well, on Saturday we're playing a $14 million football game."

Such issues will earn the BCS another December's worth of slings and arrows, but last weekend member schools solved a much bigger problem when they signed a new, four-year television contract with Fox. The situation had reached a critical point, underscoring the BCS's unsteady foundations, when current rights holder ABC pulled out of the negotiations last Friday. ABC, which had already renewed its contract with the Rose Bowl through 2014 for an increase in fees, offered 11% less annually for the other BCS bowls over the four-year life of the proposed deal, largely because of the addition of a fifth game that will increase access to non–BCS conferences but that BCS insiders and TV executives fear will water down the product. Fox will pay upwards of $80 million annually for the four non–Rose Bowls, a 4.5% increase in the total package but a drop in per-game average from $25.5 million to around $20 million. "People complain that we make decisions in the BCS based on money," says one BCS insider. "Well, of course it's about money. We're all running businesses: our bowls, the athletic directors, the television networks. Tell me what business accepts being told that over the next four years you'll have no revenue growth."

To understand the system, enroll in SI's three-part BCS 101 class.

LESSON I: *How We Got Here*

The process that led to the creation of the BCS in 1998 began seven years earlier, when college football was in the midst of a massive overhaul. Notre Dame had signed an exclusive contract with NBC. Onetime independents Florida State, Miami and Penn State had joined conferences. The SEC expanded to 12 teams and added a lucrative championship game; the Big 12 would soon be formed and do likewise. An air of insecurity hung over the sport, and bowls and conferences scurried to solidify their postseason tie-ins, forming first the Bowl Coalition (1992–94) and then the Bowl Alliance (1995–97). Those were improvements on the old system, under which deals for bowl berths were often struck in early November, but they didn't include the Rose Bowl and its partners, the Big Ten and Pac-10.

In 1996 ABC, which owned the rights to the Rose Bowl, persuaded the Tournament of Roses, the Big Ten and the Pac-10 to join the other four major conferences in a postseason system beginning in '98, then enlisted SEC commissioner Roy Kramer as coordinator. This arrangement—the BCS—increased the likelihood of getting No. 1 and No. 2 together in any given year, but that was just part of the value.

"One big factor was that this would be a system controlled by the commissioners and the major conferences," says a person who was involved with the '96 negotiations and spoke on condition of anonymity. "There was noise back then about the NCAA getting involved in postseason football, and that was something nobody at the commissioner level wanted. This gave them control over where their teams went and how the money was shared."

Kramer, now retired, says, "There were several purposes, but clearly we wanted to preserve conference stability and the bowl structure." Those underpinnings continue to motivate the BCS powers.

LESSON II: *Why It's Unsatisfactory*

In its early form the BCS title game was meant to match up the top two teams in the polls. However, the AP and the football writers who vote in its poll balked. "They wanted to report the news, not make it," says Kramer. So a system was created that used not only the two polls but also computer rankings, which have become the biggest target on the BCS's back, for an obvious reason. "The system couldn't *guarantee* a One versus Two," says Tranghese. "We knew that from the beginning."

The public would like a full-blown eight- or 16-team playoff. "We're not going there; the presidents do not want it," says Pac-10 commissioner Tom Hansen, voicing the BCS's mantra, usually couched in worry for the players' classroom schedule *(sidebar, left)*.

The oft-discussed compromise is one extra game, played after the bowls, that matches the two teams still standing at No. 1 and No. 2. But while the BCS has agreed to add a fifth game for its next contract, that game does not create this hoped-for "plus-one" system. "That's also a playoff," says Hansen. "We aren't going there, either. ABC kept coming back to us with the plus-one, but it's not going to happen."

However, Miami president Donna Shalala suggests that the plus-one will not die easily. "We at Miami do not support a playoff bowl game," Shalala told SI. "But I think it's going to be a significant issue in the near future. There are going to be discussions."

LESSON III: *Who's Left Out*

Conferences outside the power six have sought access to the BCS bowls (and their money) from the start, and the fifth game, with two more at-large spots, is meant to meet that demand. But what the outsiders *really* want is the football equivalent of the NCAA basketball tournament's automatic bid. "The lower-level BCS-conference teams can be 1–10 every year but someday rise up and get a chance that we don't get," says Mountain West commissioner Craig Thompson. "It's all about access for us."

Why? Obviously, playing on the national stage boosts a program's profile. But the

Six years ago a Swiss firm called ISL proposed a 16-team college football playoff with a rights fee of $350 million per year. Insiders were skeptical of the figure, and the proposal was quickly dismissed. "The ISL people were naive to think they could come take over something the NCAA would probably wind up running," says one network executive. "But there's no doubt that a playoff would make significantly more money than the current bowl system."

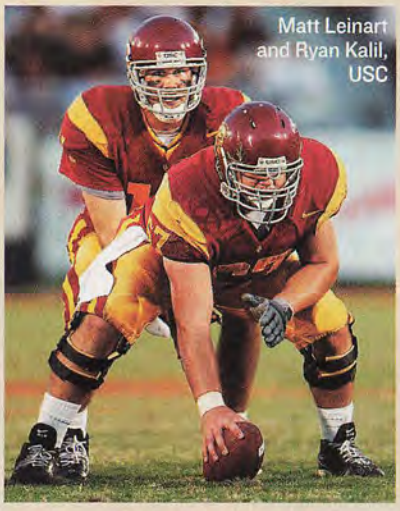
Don't hold your breath waiting for one. "[Division I-A] presidents have completely rejected an NFL-style playoff," says Penn State president Graham Spainer. "The principal concerns have been the creation of an extra game in the schedule, the potential lengthening of the season and over-commercialization. These factors have outweighed sentiments about increased revenue. So far there has been no dollar figure that has swayed presidential thinking, and most presidents say it isn't, in the long run, about money."

Critics of the presidents' stance are quick to point out that, in the long run, many other aspects of college sports—most notably, the $600 million-per-year NCAA basketball tournament—are, in fact, precisely about money. —T.L.

PREVIOUS SPREAD: PETER READ MILLER (4); OTTO GUIELE JR./GETTY IMAGES (4); ROBERT BECK (3); JOHN BIEVER (2); JOHN W. MCDONOUGH; DAVID BERGMAN; BOB ROSATO; GARY BOGDON; DARREN CARROLL; PATRICK GEE; MICHAEL PIMENTEL/ICON SMI; LAIZURE PHOTO/WIREIMAGE.COM; JOE ROBBINS/US PRESSWIRE; TIM TADDER/NEWSPORT/ROBERT E. HUDSON JR./ICON SMI; STEVE GRAYSON/WIREIMAGE.COM; BETTMAN/CORBIS (COMPUTER)

ORANGE BOWL: It's Cal vs. Utah!

TO PLUMB the mind-boggling depths of the BCS's bowl-selection process, a team of SI analysts spent the better part of last weekend spinning bowl-lineup scenarios. We figured how the bowls will most likely look if all the top teams win out, imagined what the ideal bowl picture would be if BCS conference winners didn't have guaranteed slots, and came up with one among the many outrageous lineups within the realm of possibility. How crazy is the last? A Syracuse official, when informed on Sunday that his team (currently 5–5 and unranked in the BCS top 25) was still alive for a $14 million bowl, responded, "Really?"



Matt Leinart and Ryan Kalil, USC

Will Be

ORANGE: USC vs. Oklahoma
SUGAR: Auburn vs. Virginia Tech
ROSE: Cal vs. Michigan
FIESTA: Utah vs. Boston College

Cedric Benson, Texas

Should Be

ORANGE: USC vs. Oklahoma
SUGAR: Auburn vs. Louisville
ROSE: Cal vs. Boise State
FIESTA: Utah vs. Texas

J.J. Arrington, Cal

Could Be*

ORANGE: Cal vs. Utah
SUGAR: Tennessee vs. Virginia
ROSE: USC vs. Michigan
FIESTA: Iowa State vs. Syracuse

*If: 1) **USC** loses to Notre Dame and UCLA to finish 10–2; the Pac-10 champ Trojans would play Big 10 champ **Michigan**. 2) **Iowa State** defeats Missouri to win the Big 12 North, then upsets Oklahoma in the conference title game. 3) Auburn loses to **Tennessee** in the SEC title game. 4) **Cal** beats Southern Mississippi and climbs to BCS No. 1. 5) Texas loses to Texas A&M; **Utah** rises to No. 2 in the BCS. 6) Virginia beats Virginia Tech and Virginia Tech beats Miami, leaving the Cavaliers, Hokies and Florida State in a tie in the ACC. The team with the highest BCS ranking—possibly **Virginia**—would get the bid. 7) **Syracuse** beats Boston College and Pitt beats West Virginia, leaving the Big East in a four-way tie among those teams. Because Syracuse and Pitt would tie for best head-to-head record among the four, the conference berth would go to the team with the higher BCS ranking or, if neither is in the BCS top 25, the better ranking in the BCS's 1 to 117 computer-poll compilation.

immediate, tangible payoff is even more important. Consider that the BCS currently throws the Mountain West and four other mid-major Division I-A conferences a $1,050,000 annual bone. In the Mountain West that money is split among eight teams, in shares of $131,250. A Fiesta Bowl berth for Utah would bring the Utes more than $5 million and its conference brethren no less than $1 million.

BCS conferences budget this type of money every year. "We always count on X dollars in revenue sharing," says Virginia Tech AD Jim Weaver. When the Hokies went to the national title game in '99 they earned more than $4 million. More than $1.5 million of that went to improving football facilities and coaches' salaries.

"I don't like the fact that we can't pay our assistant coaches enough," says Meyer. "That money would make a difference."

However, granting access to *more* teams from *more* conferences doesn't make everyone happy. This year Texas, No. 5 in the BCS rankings, will likely be driven out by Utah's guaranteed berth. "Good for them, bad for us," says Texas athletic director Deloss Dodds, a playoff proponent.

Bowls are not thrilled about selling tickets to representatives from mid-major conferences, especially for an extra game played at the national championship site, one week early, as will likely be the plan for the fifth BCS game. "It creates more supply, which is the worst possible thing for our industry," says the BCS insider. "You can't legislate a market. To argue that a 9–2 champion from a minor conference is as valuable to the bowls as 9–2 Nebraska, for instance, it won't work." Still, any new TV deal will increase access for mid-majors. While Utah has to finish in the top six in the BCS rankings for an automatic spot, future teams need finish only in the top 12.

ON SOME levels the BCS is a roaring success. It has eliminated the antiquated bowl free-for-all and preserved the sport's cutthroat regular season, an underrated selling point. Plus, even controversy attracts attention. "Before the BCS our sport was getting flat," says Kramer. "Now we get interest in December we never got before. It's not all positive, but it's coverage."

The system, above all, has proved itself resilient. As long as the TV money keeps coming, the BCS will endure, shedding criticism like nonstick cookware and on occasion even putting together the perfect championship game. "We're going to see many more years like this," says Dodds. "There's no use in fighting it anymore." □

FROM LEFT: STEVE GRAYSON/WIREIMAGE.COM; DARREN CARROLL; OTTO GREULE JR./GETTY IMAGES

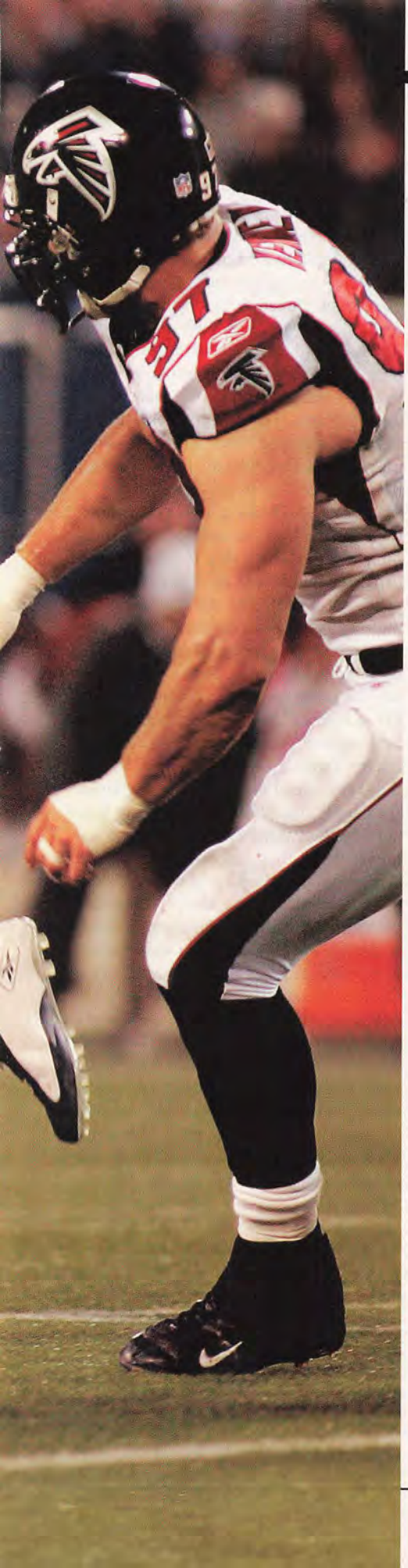
IN A HURRY Wary of the Falcons' pass rush and his shaky line, Manning tried to get rid of the ball fast—sometimes too fast.

The Kid Steps Out

In his first NFL start, Giants rookie quarterback **Eli Manning** impressed teammates and opponents alike. Now, how quickly can he learn to win?

BY JOSH ELLIOTT

Photographs by Al Tielemans



ALL ALONE and on the move, Eli Manning never wavered. With every step through the throng of autograph hounds and well-wishers idling near the players' parking lot at Giants Stadium on Sunday, hours after New York's 14–10 loss to the Atlanta Falcons, the rookie quarterback droned on about the mistakes he'd made, shouldering all the blame for the defeat and emphasizing his need to "watch more film" and "play more games," the better to "gain confidence" and "comfort" with the "speed of the NFL." It was a familiar refrain—seeing as he'd delivered exactly the same message to the assembled media just minutes before. It was also vintage Manning: displaying grace and poise for the cameras, parrying questions like a 10-year veteran and, now, beating a retreat even while hitting his talking points with numbing consistency.

Until, that is, he arrived at his slate-gray SUV and, alone and distracted, finally let his feelings show. "How long will this first loss sting?" he was asked. He sighed and, for once, abandoned the spin. "I don't know," he said, "but I'm not looking forward to finding out."

It was a startling admission, coming from a member of such an image-conscious family, and on a day steeped in intrigue: the first NFL start of the top pick in the 2004 draft; the continuation of an unprecedented family tradition; a desperate city's long search for a true NFL superstar; and, not least, a tailspinning team's fight for its playoff life.

KEEPER Shockey gave Eli the football after his first TD pass.

Afterward it was tempting to judge Manning as he's always been judged: in comparison with others, be it his father, Archie, the New Orleans Saints' alltime passing leader; his brother Peyton, the Indianapolis Colts' prolific passer; or Ben Roethlisberger, the Pittsburgh Steelers' stellar rookie signal-caller, who is 8–0 as a starter.

But the Giants care only how Manning's performance compared with that of deposed starter Kurt Warner. After Manning's solid debut (17 of 37 passing, 162 yards, one touchdown and two interceptions), it seems fair to say that the team, while in able hands, hasn't yet found the cure for its fading fortunes. Sunday's loss was the third straight and the fourth in five games for the Giants (5–5), whose road gets no easier this week, when the NFC East rival Philadelphia Eagles (9–1) come to the New Jersey Meadowlands.

Still, the precocious rookie's opening bow won rave reviews from teammates and opponents alike. "All year we've seen his ability," Giants tailback Tiki Barber said. "The way he stepped in this week was awesome—not just on the field but in the locker room, with the things he said or didn't say. He didn't try too hard, didn't force anything. Yeah, we're in Eli's hands now."

Said Falcons linebacker Keith Brooking, "All week long we'd say among ourselves, 'Let's welcome Eli to the NFL.' We didn't talk to him, we acted like he wasn't there. But we came away with tremendous respect for him. You could see it. Nothing fazes him."

The same could no longer be said for Warner, the two-time league MVP as a St. Louis Ram who'd looked like a shell of his formerly productive self in the last month as New York's starter. While most of the responsibility for the Giants' league-leading 40 sacks allowed before Sunday lay with the line, Warner was also to blame. Besides having trouble holding on to the ball—he has fumbled 12 times this season—he looked increasingly feeble in the face of a pass rush. Too often he either missed or ignored open receivers downfield. Despite completing 62.7% of his passes, Warner had thrown only six touchdown passes in nine games—and none to starting wideouts Amani Toomer and Ike Hilliard.

Following a 17–14 road loss to the Arizona Cardinals on Nov. 14, Giants coach Tom Coughlin had seen enough. He called Warner into his office the following day and told him he was being benched, and then he summoned Manning to tell him of

his promotion. Oddly, Coughlin didn't announce the move to the team, instead letting word of the switch leak into the locker room. Many Giants were caught off guard, but "it wasn't a situation where anyone was pointing fingers at Kurt," Barber says. "Coach obviously felt like he needed to make a change. As players, it's our job to make that change as seamless as possible. With his work ethic and personality, Eli made that easy."

Easy is, in fact, Manning's nickname, which he picked up as a youngster in New Orleans. Even as his first NFL start loomed, Manning seemed as excited as a mortician, strolling through the locker room wearing his usual hangdog expression. But that mien, say his veteran teammates, belies his preparation and unflappability. "There's a reason this guy was drafted where he was," Hilliard says. "He's the real deal."

Indeed, from the preseason quarterback competition through the recent weeks, when New York tabloids and talk-radio mouths were howling for Warner's head, Manning remained the picture of calm. After all, comfort in the spotlight is a family hallmark. Manning knew his every move would be scrutinized, so he followed his brother's example, inhaling the playbook and throwing himself into film study.

But the true test wouldn't come, of course, until he stepped on the field, and on Sunday he started shakily. While his mandate was clear—drop back quickly, make reads quickly, throw quickly—he looked skittish in the pocket and sprayed several passes in the first half. "I was so concerned with getting rid of the ball," he said, "that I was throwing when my guys weren't ready. I made some mistakes." So, too, did his receivers: In the first half alone they dropped five catchable balls. Meanwhile, Falcons quarterback Michael Vick was playing Superman, using his arm and feet to lead two touchdown drives (both of which ended with scoring throws to tight end Alge Crumpler) and put Atlanta up 14–0 with 9:09 left in the second quarter. After that, said Giants tackle David Diehl, "Eli settled down, and we started playing the way we can in the second half."

With 12:30 remaining in the third quarter, a decidedly more comfortable Manning took the Giants on a 16-play, 72-yard drive that ended with his first touchdown pass, a six-yarder to tight end Jeremy Shockey. New York's defense forced a Falcons punt two minutes later, and the Giants looked ready to tie the score at 14 when disaster struck. On second-and-five at the Falcons' 28, Manning made a mistake against one of Atlanta's rare zone blitzes, throwing a quick slant to his left that Falcons end Brady Smith intercepted *(box, left)*. Though on their ensuing possession the Giants drove the ball to Atlanta's eight, they had to settle for Steve Christie's 24-yard field goal with 6:28 left.

That would be the closest Manning would come to guiding his team to victory, despite having a final shot with the ball at the New York 26 with 1:52 remaining. On fourth-and-three at the Atlanta 42, Manning's pass to Shockey was batted away by Brooking.

Surrounded by cameras as he left the field, Manning was already in full self-abuse mode. "I was disappointed," he said, "because as a quarterback that's what you want: the ball in your hands, with a chance to win the game." But Coughlin, for one, was sanguine.

"I asked for a great effort and got a great effort," the coach said. "But we needed guys to step up and help [Manning] make plays, and they didn't."

If the Giants are to make the playoffs, they'd better step up soon. Their $54 million man can't afford a lengthy learning curve. The ship is taking on water by the day. If Manning is to keep it from sinking, he'll have to be much better next week.

Just ask him. □

HEINZ KLUETMEIER

"A Rookie Mistake"

WELCOME TO the big leagues, kid. That's the message a swarming NFL defense sent to the first pick of the 2004 draft late in the third quarter of Sunday's game at Giants Stadium. And though Eli Manning would have other chances to pull out a victory, this would be the play he'd regret most after the Falcons flew home with a 14–10 win.

ELI'S COMEDOWN The Giants were driving for a tying touchdown when Smith's interception turned the game.

Atlanta led 14–7, but Manning had all the momentum. Earlier in the quarter he'd led the Giants on the first scoring drive of his NFL career—a crisp 72-yard march. Now New York had the ball, second-and-five, on the Falcons' 28.

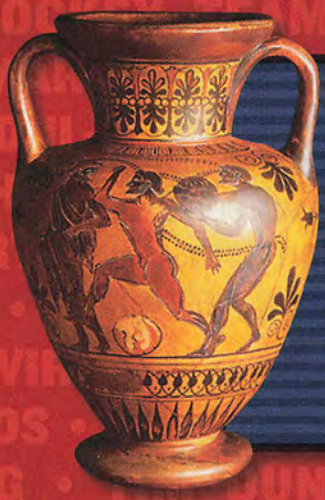
Atlanta defensive coordinator Ed Donatell called for Strong Dog 3, a zone blitz. The weakside end, Brady Smith, dropped into coverage while the two strongside linebackers, Chris Draft and Matt Stewart, blitzed over the tight end side. It was the perfect call. "We thought the tendency they showed was to throw a slant on second down," said Falcons coach Jim Mora. Zone blitzes are especially effective against quick slants and crosses, because the quarterback often has to adjust his throws to work the ball around defensive linemen who have dropped into areas that are usually unoccupied.

At the snap Manning saw Draft and Stewart coming on his right. A veteran quarterback knows that two blitzers coming from the same area of the field leave a vacancy behind them, so he might first look there for a receiver in a seam. But a rookie quarterback is more inclined to look away from the chaos. At least he *thinks* he's looking away from the chaos. Manning immediately looked left for wideout Amani Toomer, but he never saw the 6′ 5″, 274-pound Smith, who got his first interception after 8½ NFL seasons.

"I thought I had the slant open," said Manning, "but I threw it right to [Smith]. I guess you'd call it a rookie mistake."

It's a mistake Manning probably won't make a month from now, which is why Mora was glad to escape the Meadowlands with a win. "I'm glad we got Eli in his first start," he said, "not his fourth or fifth. I think he's going to be just like his brother [Peyton] in a couple of years." —*Peter King*

An Honor Like No Other



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The Race To End All Races

In the closest title chase in NASCAR history, Kurt Busch survived a wheel-dropping, roller-coaster race at Homestead–Miami Speedway to take the inaugural Nextel Cup

BY LARS ANDERSON

Photographs by Bob Rosato

THE VAN rolled through the darkness, past straggling fans, as it left the infield at Homestead–Miami Speedway late Sunday night. Four hours had passed since the checkered flag had been waved on NASCAR's 2004 season, and in the back of the white Ford E-350 a skinny 26-year-old wearing a Champagne-soaked driver's suit munched on a pulled-pork sandwich and a chocolate cookie, his championship dinner. He hadn't won the race, but he'd won the crown, and a torchlit celebration in South Beach awaited his arrival. As Kurt Busch gazed out the window into the breezy night, one of his friends asked if he realized how close he'd come to crashing on Lap 93 of the Ford 400—an accident that surely would have prevented him from becoming the third youngest driver to win a Cup title?

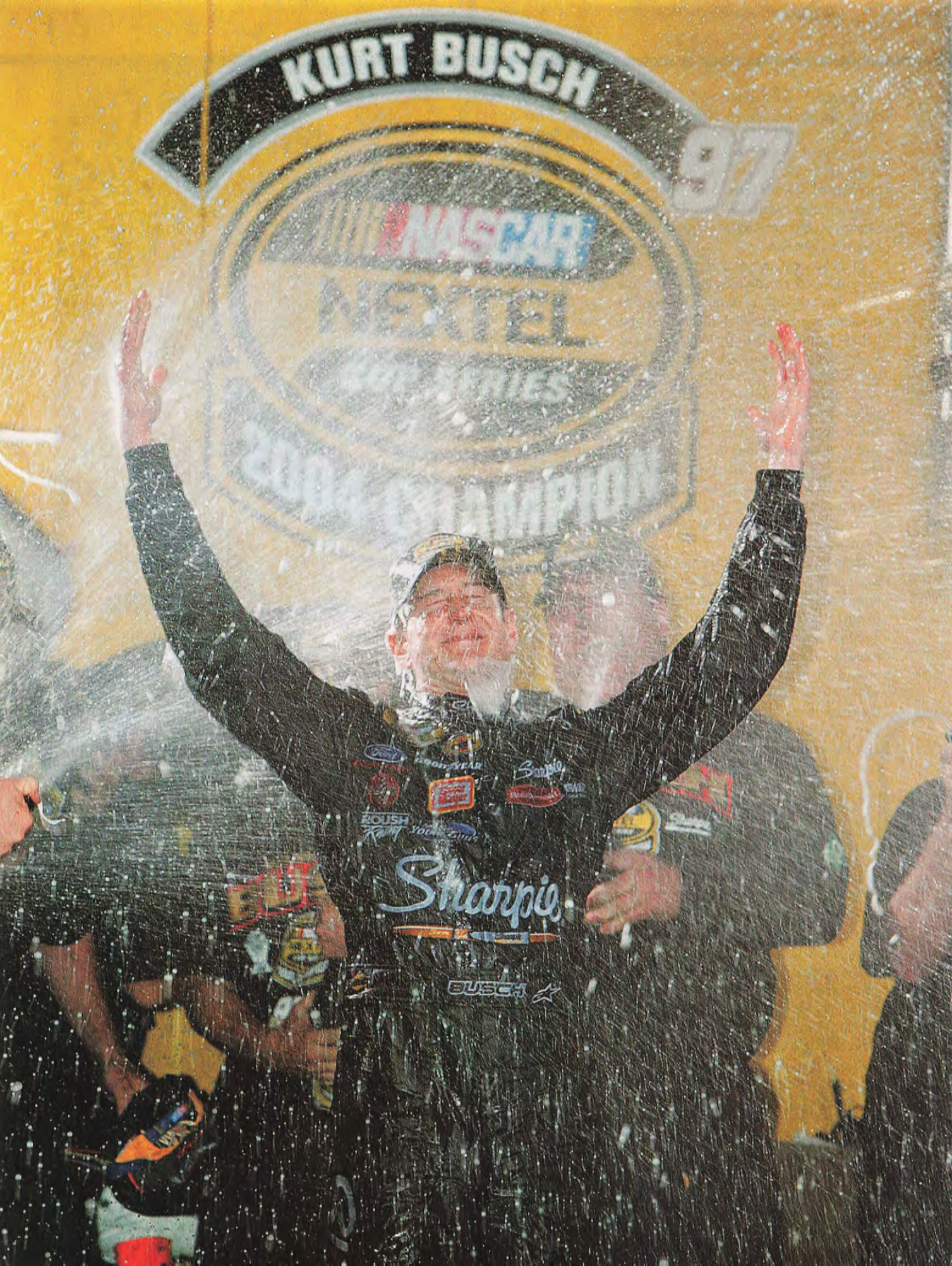
"I know it was close," said Busch with a sly smile, "but, Dude, I'm trying to create some fans. You gotta have drama."

Let the record show that Busch, NASCAR's drama king of 2004, came within about 10 inches of wrecking his number 97 Ford in what turned out to be the closest championship race in the 55 years of NASCAR. Heading into Sunday's season finale at Homestead, Busch led Jimmie Johnson by 18 points, Jeff Gordon by 21, Dale Earnhardt Jr. by 72 and Mark Martin by 82. Then, on Lap 93 of a scheduled 267, the wheels nearly came off Busch's title run—literally. While running in second place, Busch thought that he felt his right front tire losing air pressure. As he dived off the track and into the pits for a tire change, his right front wheel broke at the hub, and the wheel and tire bounded away. Skidding in a shower of sparks, Busch swerved to his left, just missing the water barriers at the head of pit lane, and limped into his pit stall. Because his tire had rolled onto the track, officials waved the caution flag. That allowed Busch to stay on the lead lap, but he plummeted to 28th place in the race—which, based on where Johnson and Gordon were running, would have left him third in the championship standings. "My heart stopped when I saw how close he was to the pit wall," said Jack Roush, Busch's owner.

For the next two hours Gordon, Johnson and Busch played a game of championship leapfrog as their track positions changed. On Lap 132 Johnson, who'd moved into third place in the race, was up by 48 points. By Lap 178 Gordon was running fourth and atop the standings by 36 points. But Busch calmly worked his way up through the field. With five laps remaining, he'd advanced to seventh. But even if Busch held that position, Gordon (in fourth) could still take the Cup by winning; his Hendrick Motorsports teammate Johnson (in fifth) could finish second and win it all himself.

SPARKS AND SPRAY Busch dodged disaster when he lost a wheel on Lap 93 and then climbed back to fifth place—and the title.

REINHOLD MATAY/WIREIMAGE.COM


KURT BUSCH
97
NASCAR
NEXTEL
Sharpie
BUSCH

The race was extended by four laps because of a late caution. Just before the final restart, the crowd of 70,000 rose to its feet. After more than nine months of racing, 36 stops on the Cup circuit and 10,755 total laps turned, the title came down to a green-white-checker finish. Two laps. Even some veteran pit reporters who've seen it all said they were nervous.

At the restart Gordon, in third, and Johnson, in fourth, made all-out charges but didn't have enough juice under the hood to blast to the front. Johnson finished second behind winner Greg Biffle (a teammate of Busch's) and Gordon took third. And so it was Busch, a Las Vegas native, who hit the $5.3 million jackpot—the champion's purse—by finishing fifth. He ended the season with eight more points than Johnson and 16 more than Gordon. "The NFL has the Super Bowl, baseball has the World Series and now NASCAR has this season-ending race in the Chase," said Busch. "I've never driven so hard in my life. Man, what a couple of weeks!"

Indeed, the Ford 400 capped an arresting month of racing, perhaps the best sustained wheel-to-wheel action in NASCAR history. Over the last four races, drivers attempted moves seemingly more suited to carnival bumper cars than to 3,400-pound stock cars. It was great theater, which explains why television ratings for the final 10 races jumped 10% from last year and why on Sunday, NBC had its highest-ever rating (5.6) for a NASCAR race during the NFL regular season. "I've been around for a while," says Gordon, a four-time Cup champion, "and I've never seen so much aggression on the track."

The stirring finale vindicates NASCAR's controversial off-season decision to change its scoring system. Instead of giving equal weight to each race, as in the past, the new Chase for the Cup format created a playoff-style sprint to the title. (After the 26th race of the season, NASCAR adjusted the point totals of the top 10 drivers so that the gap from one position to the next was just five points. Only the top 10 drivers were eligible to win the 10-race shootout.)

The Chase concept was the brainchild of Mark Dyer, NASCAR's vice president of licensing. As he watched Matt Kenseth run away with the 2003 points title during a less than thrilling—O.K., *boring*—last month of the season, Dyer suggested to NASCAR chairman Brian France that "maybe we should have a championship season within the season." A few days later Dyer sent a two-page e-mail to France outlining a playoff-style format. France floated the idea to other NASCAR executives and drivers and even to some fans. The vast majority told him that it sounded more idiotic than New Coke.

"I thought the idea had a lot of merit," said France on Saturday as he sat in the NASCAR hauler at Homestead. "Then I called my dad [former NASCAR chairman Bill France Jr.], and his response was, 'That sounds a little far out there.' "

Yet Brian remained convinced that he needed to do something to shake NASCAR out of its end-of-the-season doldrums. Since 1999 the second-place driver had trailed the leader by an average of 233 points entering the final race. So Brian, whose grandfather Bill France Sr. founded NASCAR, green-lighted the radical makeover. NASCAR polls conducted early in the 2004 season indicated that 90% of the fans were against the change. But by the fall, fans, drivers and car owners had embraced the Chase because it created something that past seasons had lacked: suspense. A recent ESPN.com poll revealed that 65% of NASCAR fans now favor the Chase format.

BUDDY SYSTEM Biffle (front, left) wasn't in the Chase, but his win in the Ford 400 helped clinch the title for teammate Busch (right).

"I wasn't really too hot about it in the beginning, but it's grown on me," says driver Elliott Sadler, who wound up ninth in the Chase. "If there's a football game and the score is 49–3 in the fourth quarter, well, you aren't going to watch it. But if it's 10–10 in the fourth quarter, you're going to pay attention."

After the first six weeks of the Chase, however, it looked as if NASCAR was destined for another dud of a finish; Busch held a commanding 96-point lead. He had been nearly flawless in that run, finishing sixth or better in all six races. But on Halloween he blew an engine on Lap 51 of the Bass Pro Shops MBNA 500 in Atlanta and finished 42nd. Johnson blazed to Victory Lane in Atlanta for his third straight win and climbed into second place, within striking distance (59 points) of Busch. More significant, at least four drivers now had a shot at catching Busch, which meant that none of the contenders could afford to "points race." That's motor-sports lingo for driving defensively—the racing equivalent of

> "The NFL has the Super Bowl, baseball has the World Series and now NASCAR has this season-ending race," said Busch. "I've **NEVER DRIVEN SO HARD** in my life."

Dean Smith's four-corners offense. Now they all had to go for it.

And Busch, showing newfound maturity, held them off. In 2003 Busch won four races and finished 11th in points, but he's best remembered for his dustup with fellow driver Jimmy Spencer during an August race at Michigan International Speedway. That day Busch and Spencer, who had an ongoing feud, made contact on the track. Busch radioed his crew and, forgetting that others were listening, reported that he had tried to "flatten [Spencer's] fender." After the race Spencer, an old school sort, punched Busch in the nose. Busch told reporters he'd done nothing to provoke Spencer, but when Busch's in-car audiotape was made public, he was put on probation for the rest of '03. Suddenly he was NASCAR's youngest black knight.

During the off-season Busch's primary sponsor, Newell-Rubbermaid, offered to send him to a stress-management specialist. Busch accepted, and ever since the green flag dropped at the Daytona 500 last February, he has appeared more relaxed in front of the media and more controlled on the track. On Sunday night, while speaking to fans in the garage, the newly-crowned champion acknowledged that he'd "acted like an idiot" in the past. He then paid tribute to his 51-year-old mentor and crew chief, Jimmy Fennig, saying Fennig "taught me how to win."

Busch's youthful mistakes can be attributed in part to his turbo-charged rise to Cup level. Consider: In 1999 Busch was competing against weekend warriors in the Southwest Series. Late that year he won a tryout for a seat in one of Roush's trucks in the NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series in the 2000 season. Roush was so smitten with Busch's abilities—Robbie Loomis, Gordon's crew chief, calls Busch a "talent that comes along once every 10 years"—that seven months later he elevated Busch to his Cup team. This meant that all of Busch's callow missteps played out on NASCAR's biggest stage, instead of in the backwater of the Truck or Busch series. "Every single one of my mistakes was at this elite level," says Busch. "Maybe I should have waited another year in the truck."

His past may always trail Busch, but late on Sunday, as five police officers escorted him from one postrace interview to the next, fans wearing Dale Earnhardt Jr. T-shirts and Jeff Gordon hats kept running up and yelling their congratulations. Busch always turned his head, looked them in the eye, smiled and said thanks. For those few moments, the baby-faced Busch looked all grown-up. □

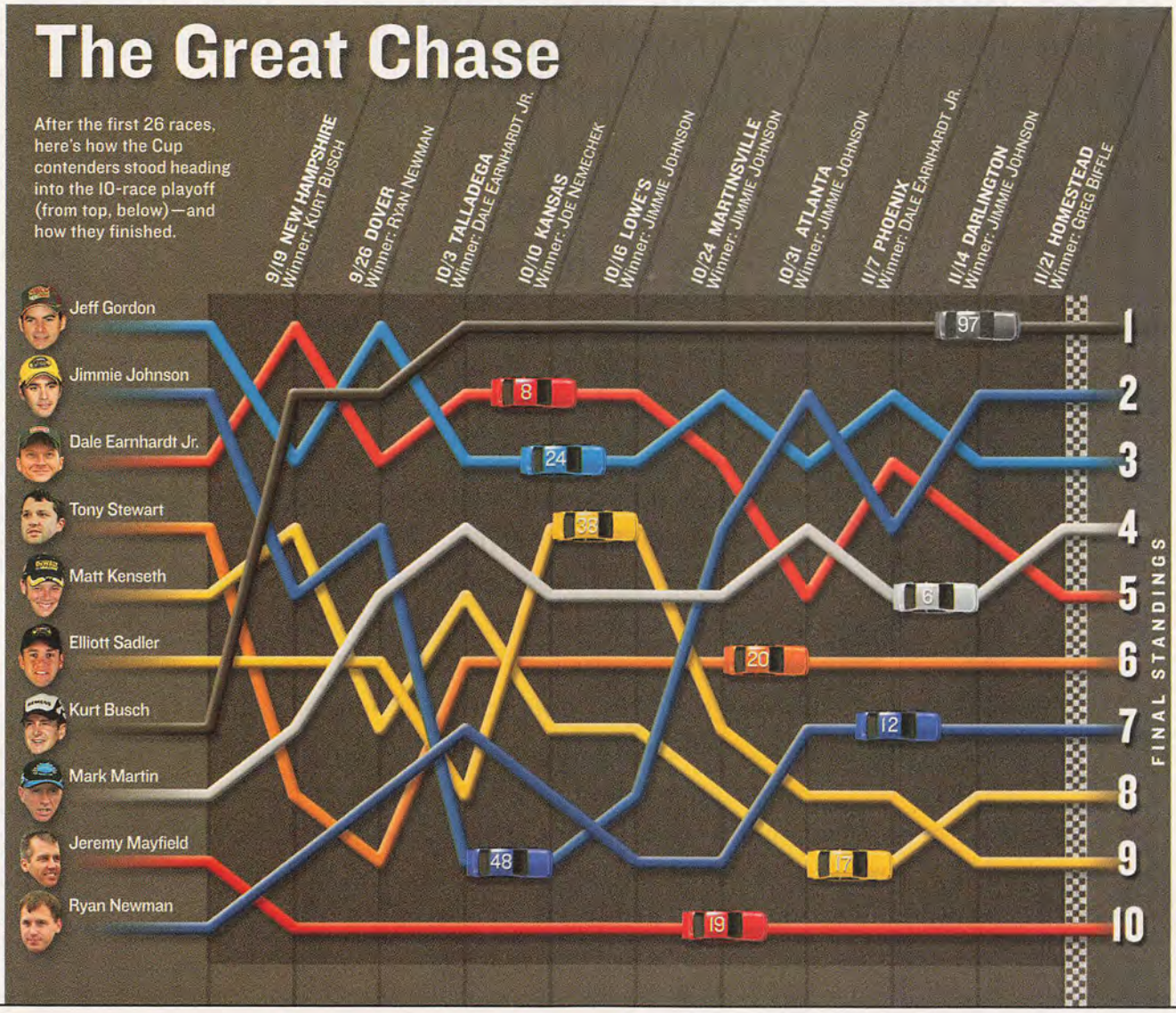


CHART: SLIM FILMS; PHOTOS FROM TOP: BOB BRODBECK/AP; REX BROWN/WIREIMAGE.COM; WORTH CANOY/ICON SMI; RIC FELD/AP (2); NASCAR/KRT/ABACA; JOE ROBBINS; WORTH CANOY/ICON SMI; CRAIG PETERSON/ICON SMI; WORTH CANOY/ICON SMI

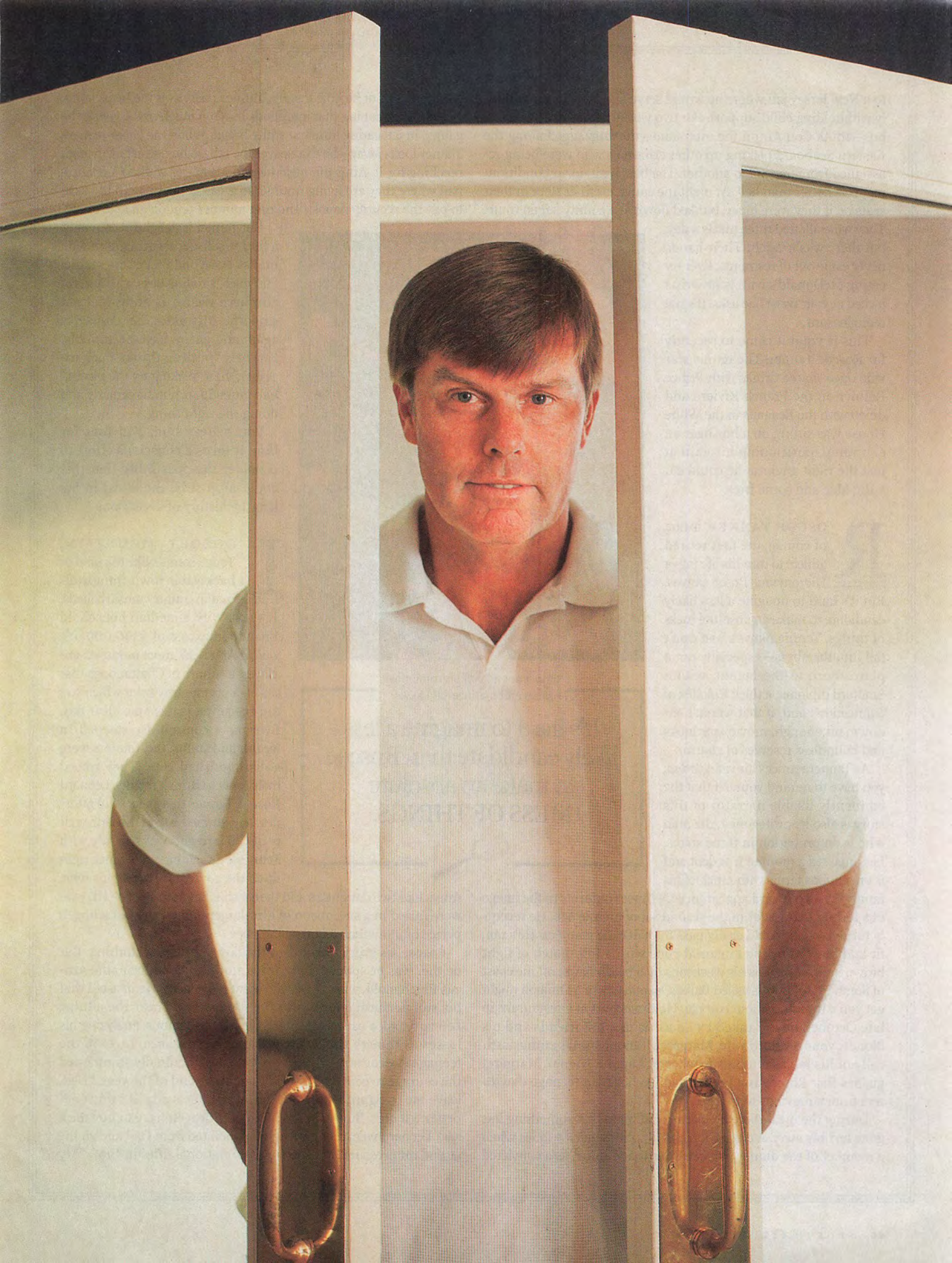
OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

In a spectacular flameout after he retired from tennis, **Roscoe Tanner** deceived his friends and family and ended up penniless and in jail. Now he hopes to heal the wounds he's inflicted and repay all his debts—but it won't be easy

BY L. JON WERTHEIM

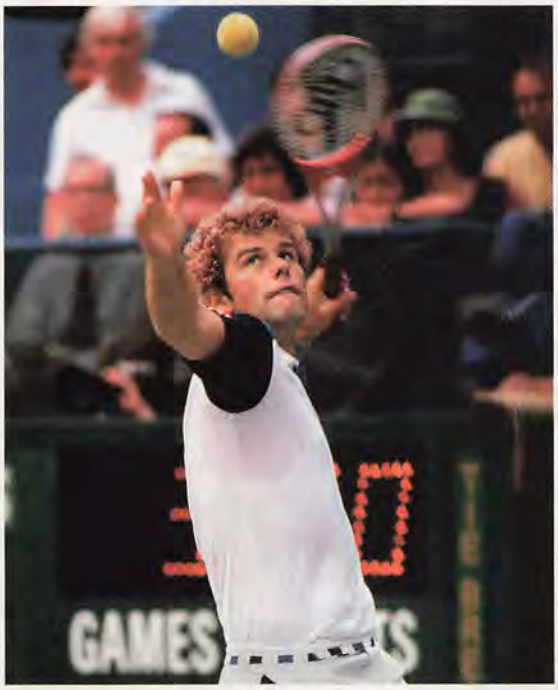
Photograph by David Strick

ROCK BOTTOM? That's tough to pinpoint, he says, sighing. So many lows to choose from. Rock bottom might have come when he walked into that Stygian cell in a German prison and realized that for the length of his stay he would be defecating in front of his cellmate. "Man," he says, "that was humiliating." The time he was arrested in front of all those fans at a senior tennis event, that was pretty embarrassing, too. And when his father, once his most ardent supporter, turned uncommunicative, that one really stung. No, wait, I've got it, he says. Here's the lowest moment of his odyssey: Immediately after he finished serving four months in a maximum security county jail in Florida on a grand theft charge, he was transferred



to a New Jersey jail where he would serve five months for willfully withholding child support. For two weeks he sat on a TransCor bus—think Con Air on the interstate—that zigzagged along the Eastern Seaboard picking up other criminals who were being reassigned from one jail to another. The bus, with no air conditioning, was hotter than hell. At night the convicts either slept in their seats or, if they were lucky, bunked down at a county jail en route. They were allotted three meals a day, but there was a catch: Their hands never came out of restraints. Ever try eating McDonald's with your wrists locked at your waist? he asks. It's not real pleasant.

This is what it came to recently for Roscoe Tanner. The tennis star who once shared drinks with Prince Rainier on the French Riviera and dined with the Reagans in the White House was sitting on a bus near an exit ramp, positioning his chin at just the right angle so he could eat a Big Mac and some fries.



Tanner got rich off his cannonball serve and matinee-idol looks.

ROSCOE TANNER is not, of course, the first retired athlete to turn his life into a Hieronymus Bosch canvas. But it's hard to imagine a less likely candidate to make an absolute mess of things. Tennis players just don't fall into the abyss—especially not a player born to the manor, with a Stanford diploma, a thick Rolodex of connections and, if that weren't endowment enough, movie-star looks and boundless reserves of charm.

As Tanner retraces his *via dolorosa*, you have to remind yourself that the eminently likable narrator of this story is also its protagonist, the man who is on probation in three states, has amassed a mountain of debt and is on tenuous terms with much of his family. By all outward appearances, Tanner conforms to the image of a former tennis star in the second set of middle age. He recently turned 53 but could easily pass for a decade younger. He's tan, fit and blessed by the tonsorial gods with a full thatch of light brown hair. He spends his weekends on a beach haven off the coast of Southern California called Balboa Island, where $1 million might get you a three-bedroom cottage. Holding court at a restaurant in late October, he is flanked by an assortment of friends and his blonde, younger third wife, Margaret. Tanner speaks enthusiastically of his job as a tennis teacher in Laguna Niguel. Margaret gushes that Roscoe is a "super dad" to her twin teenage daughters from a previous marriage.

During the meal there are occasional hints that something has gone terribly awry. A discussion about politics quickly fades when a member of the dinner party realizes that Tanner, as a convicted felon, might not be able to vote. Tanner passes on the bruschetta, casually mentioning that it reminds him too much of the weight he gained in jail eating little but white bread. When the check arrives, Tanner looks away—he can't cover the tab, so he doesn't even feign reaching for it. After the meal he and Margaret walk to a friend's pad where they are living until Roscoe can come up with the cash to pay the security deposit and first month's rent on an apartment.

> It's hard to imagine a less likely candidate than Roscoe to make an absolute MESS OF THINGS.

But Tanner is delightful company, a funny, self-deprecating man who makes everyone feel comfortable. His voice, a rolling bass with a slight Southern twang, is nothing if not smooth. Mistakes, he concedes again and again, have been made. But he's "putting things back together," he's "picking up the pieces," he's "attending church regularly and doing the right thing."

You believe him. You root for him. It takes a conscious effort to consider the possibility that this could all just be the latest in his lengthy history of deceptions.

LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN, Tenn., sounds like the kind of backwater town immortalized in country music ballads. It's not. With a median household income in excess of $100,000, it's one of America's most moneyed enclaves, a suburb of Chattanooga that sits on a promontory from which you can see seven states on a clear day. Even in a community steeped in wealth and status, the Tanners were a distinguished clan. They traced their roots to British royalty. Leonard Roscoe Tanner II, a successful attorney, had studied law at the University of Chicago and was friendly with Tennessee's leading politicians, right up to the governor. He and his wife, Anne, had two daughters and then a son, Leonard Roscoe III, who were raised in a succession of ever-larger homes, the last a doge's palace of more than 7,000 square feet.

Roscoe, as everybody called the boy, wanted for nothing. But neither was he spoiled. Leonard, a stoic father cut from the Atticus Finch mold, was, as we say today, old school. He insisted that his son perform chores and *No, Ma'am* and *Yessir* the adults. Leonard took a particular interest in his son's tennis, analyzing his losses as though they were complex legal issues. In 1966 the teenage Roscoe struggled in his matches and finally summoned the courage to confront the old man at the end of the year. "Dad, leave me to figure tennis out for myself," he said. "If I don't get better, I'll quit. But if I win a national title, you have to buy me a car." Leonard went along with that. Liberated from Dad and all the attendant pressure, Roscoe won *four* national titles in 1967. "My

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BUCKLE UP

dad didn't get me four cars, though," he says. "I got one. A used white Pontiac Tempest."

Roscoe went to the Baylor School, a semi-military academy in Chattanooga with a powerhouse tennis team coached at the time by Jerry Evert, Chris's uncle. His teammates included Zan Guerry and Brian Gottfried, both of whom would play professionally. Roscoe was an unassuming kid with no discernible ego. "I honestly can't remember a single thing not normal about him," says Gottfried. "Just a nice kid from a nice family."

In an act that amounted to his late-1960s rebellion, Tanner spurned Tennessee colleges to play for Stanford. The school had a modest tennis program that had seldom beaten UCLA or USC. But its young, upbeat coach, Dick Gould, talked of "building a tradition," and Tanner was seduced. In his first season he made the 1970 NCAA finals in both singles and doubles, and his magnetism helped Gould recruit bright prospects. Stanford would go on to win 17 NCAA titles and become the dynastic program in college tennis. "There's no question," says Gould, who retired last year, "Roscoe Tanner is the guy who put Stanford tennis on the map."

Tanner turned pro in 1972 and quickly made his presence known, reaching the quarterfinals of the U.S. Open and breaking into the top 20. His game was built around a lefthanded serve that he developed by swinging his racket at falling leaves in the Tennessee woods. Though he was not the biggest of players—6 feet and a solid 175 pounds—his serve was pure tracer fire, the product of a low ball toss and blinding racket speed. "Rocket Roscoe" once delivered a ball so hard that it snapped a net cable at the U.S. Open. Playing before racket technology went space-age, Tanner once had his serve clocked at a record 153 mph.

Snapping aces and charging the net, Tanner won the Australian Open in 1977 and, over a 12-year career, took 14 other titles and nearly 600 matches. He played on several U.S. Davis Cup squads, helping the team win the trophy in 1981. His finest hour, however, came at Wimbledon in '79. It was the first year the men's final was televised live in the U.S.—the inaugural *Breakfast at Wimbledon*—and the winsome kid from Tennessee played for the title against Bjorn Borg, the defending champ and 8-to-1 favorite. Impeccably dressed, Leonard Tanner watched nervously from the players' box as his son pushed Borg to five sets before losing a classic match.

Roscoe returned to the U.S. a full-fledged celebrity. "We did more deals for Roscoe than for a lot of guys who won bigger," says Donald Dell, Tanner's agent for much of his career. "Everyone wanted him." Racket, shoe and clothing endorsements rolled in, but his appeal wasn't limited to tennis products. Tanner appeared in TV commercials for Ivory soap, whose slogan, 99$^{44}/_{100}$% pure, would later seem richly ironic. He was invited to appear on sitcoms and to judge the Miss USA contest. In a 1988 poll asking U.S. female fans to name their favorite male athletes, Tanner ranked fourth. Wayne Gretzky was fifth. Tanner won more than $1.7 million in prize money, but that figure was dwarfed by his off-court income.

Charlotte has struggled to support her daughters by Roscoe.

"I was a smooth talker," Tanner says. "I was good at saying what the other person WANTED TO HEAR."

Tanner was handsome and had a winning smile. He was polished but not slick, melding Stanford sophistication with Southern homespun modesty. Temperamentally he offered an appealing alternative to the fire of Jimmy Connors and John McEnroe and the ice of Borg. "There was a warmth there," says Sam McCleery, a former racket company executive and an old friend of Tanner's. "Roscoe's personality was a lot like his tennis. What you saw was what you got. He came straight at you, not a lot of spin or angles."

If he wasn't the pledge master of the tennis fraternity, he was a member in good standing. Even today, Tanner's contemporaries invariably use the same phrase—"great guy"—to describe him. And his integrity was considered unimpeachable. "Put it this way," says one former player. "Roscoe was Arthur Ashe's doubles partner, and Roscoe was the straighter arrow of the two."

Tanner's longtime coach, Dennis Ralston, recalls his protégé as attentive and tractable: "Never once did Roscoe question my authority. If he told me something, I knew that I could bank on it."

An injury to his left elbow forced Tanner out of tennis in 1984, but his playing career was winding down anyway. ESPN quickly signed him to comment on televised matches, surely just the beginning of a very successful transition to another phase of life.

"You look at the guy, and he sure seemed to have it made," says McEnroe, another Stanford alum. "Never in my wildest dreams did I see what was coming. Roscoe fooled everyone, I guess."

IN RETROSPECT, anyway, there were hints that Tanner was more complex than his all-American image suggested. His parents would fly across the country to watch him play at tournaments, and when they arrived he would cruelly ignore them. Ray Moore, one of Tanner's doubles partners, nicknamed him Short Fuse for his sudden, inexplicable explosions during practice, after which he would quickly revert to his good-natured form.

Five years after his retirement from the tour, Tanner ran a senior

DAVID STRICK

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tennis event in Santa Barbara, Calif. The weekend was a success except for one thing: Tanner did not pay many of the players. He blamed it on a "sponsor screwup" and promised that the checks were forthcoming. The players had known him for years and took him at his word. The checks did arrive, but some took as long as seven months. Thinking back, former pro Dick Stockton, who played in the event and had first met Tanner in the juniors in 1961, says, "There was always an iffy side to Roscoe, things that didn't quite check out, but nothing serious enough for anyone to care."

Tanner was also, he now admits, a womanizer. He was never one to let his marriages get in the way of a good time. He met his first wife, Nancy Cook, at Stanford. They were married in 1973 and had a daughter, Lauren, in '81. But the marriage was a casualty of Tanner's infidelities—after he told her he wanted out Nancy took a pair of scissors and cut the crotch out of all of Roscoe's pants—and they divorced in '83. Not long after, Tanner met a vivacious nightclub manager in Santa Barbara named Charlotte Brady. They married within a few months, but it was only a matter of time, Tanner says, before he strayed again. "I was a smooth talker," he says. "I was good, really good, at saying whatever the other person wanted to hear."

It was the philandering that would cause the entire tapestry of his life to start unraveling. In 1993 Tanner was in New York City for a senior tennis event when he met Connie Romano, a striking woman from New Jersey. They spent a night together in his Manhattan hotel room. Tanner thought little of it—just another one-night stand on the road. (Romano says they met several times.) Then, a few months later, he got a call at the Sherwood Country Club in Thousand Oaks, Calif., where he was the director of tennis. It was Romano phoning from New Jersey to say that she was pregnant. Tanner told her he didn't think it was possible.

A few months later the summonses regarding a lawsuit for child support started arriving. Tanner says he called Romano's lawyer to discuss a settlement, but the lawyer was asking for too much money. He consented to take a DNA test, which revealed a 99.5% chance that he was the father of Romano's baby, a girl born in 1994. Nevertheless, he denied paternity on grounds that the DNA test was not conclusive enough. "He told me that he had been drugged," says Charlotte Tanner. (Roscoe denies having said this but concedes that he might have claimed he had been inebriated.) "He said that as a celebrity he was a target [of gold diggers], and I believed him." Eager to avoid bad publicity, Tanner finally agreed to a $500,000 out-of-court settlement, which at the time he did not have the means of honoring. (He claims he intended to pay Romano from $1 million he expected to make on a deal that subsequently fell through.)

When Romano received no check from Tanner and he didn't return her phone calls or respond to her lawyer's threats, she contacted authorities. In March 1997 Tanner was arrested while attending a senior tennis event in Naples, Fla., and charged with failing to appear in a New Jersey court to answer for $40,000 in missed payments to Romano. With Leonard's help, Charlotte came up with the money, and Roscoe was released. He returned to the Naples tournament the next day and, sitting in a lounge, regaled his colleagues with stories of his night in jail. When he took the court, the fans gave him a standing ovation. "Roscoe has such a way with people," says Stockton. "It was inconceivable that this great, down-to-earth guy could have done anything wrong."

E10 Saturday, May 1, 2001 SPORT

TENNIS

Tanner served arrest during seniors match

By Todd Holcomb
tholcomb@ajc.com

Former tennis champion Roscoe Tanner was arrested Friday while playing in a tournament at Ansley Golf Club, Atlanta police said.

Tanner was charged with back child support and contempt on a Dade County, Ga., warrant, according to an Atlanta Police Department report. He was transported to the Dade County Jail, where a spokeswoman said no bail had been set.

It is the second time in four years that Tanner has been arrested on child-support charges during a senior tennis tournament. In March of 1997, Tanner was arrested in Naples, Fla., on a warrant filed by a New Jersey woman who says Tanner is the father of her child born in 1994.

Tanner, 46, filed for bankruptcy in 1998, saying he could not pay the $500,000 he promised the woman four years earlier.

Tanner had lived in Dade County in northwest Georgia with his first wife, Charlotte, until last year. They have four children together.

In 1999, Tanner was planning to build an upscale indoor tennis facility called Tanner Village near Acworth but failed to secure financing. He moved to St. Petersburg last year to become tennis director of the Westshore tennis community. He is no longer employed there. Tanner said this week that he is newly married.

Tanner was playing in the Atlanta Senior Professional tennis tournament, in the 50-and-over division. The tournament draw reports that Tanner and partner Joaquin Dentucci retired after a game of their doubles match.

A native of Chattanooga, Tanner won the Australian Open in 1977 and was the Wimbledon runner-up to Bjorn Borg in 1979.

POOL Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Interrupted during play at Ansley Golf Club, Roscoe Tanner talks to a policeman before his arrest on back child support charges.

Tanner: Found in contempt

Former tennis star Roscoe Tanner jailed on child support charge

Charles Waldron represented Tanner after his arrest in 1997.

> Back at the tournament the day after his hearing, he regaled players with stories of HIS NIGHT IN JAIL.

In the months after Tanner's '97 arrest, however, plans for the lodge fell behind schedule, and investors pulled out. The bank foreclosed on the property. Tanner's endorsement deals had petered out long ago, as had the lucrative pro-am appearances. In 1998 he filed for bankruptcy. Tanner turned to his pals in the tennis world for loans. "I'd say there were 25 guys Roscoe tried to borrow from," says Moore, his old doubles partner. Several players—including Borg, Tanner's opponent in that memorable Wimbledon final—stepped up, lending Tanner a total in excess of $100,000. At least Borg *thought* he was lending the money. When no repayment was made, his representatives pursued Tanner. Finally a deal was brokered: A portion of Tanner's earnings at senior events would be deducted to make good on the debt.

As he sank deeper into debt, Tanner was spinning an ever-widening web of lies to his wife and daughters. He had taken a teaching pro job in Florida and was seldom home. Charlotte says that on Tamara's 11th birthday, in 1996, Roscoe called to say he couldn't fly home to Tennessee due to work. Charlotte later found credit card

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receipts indicating that he had been in the Cayman Islands that day.

Charlotte and Roscoe were divorced in December 2000. By that time Roscoe and Margaret Barna had already had a "ceremony of commitment" in Hawaii. (Roscoe paid their bill at the Hilton Waikoloa Village with a check that bounced.) The divorce settlement called for him to pay Charlotte $7,000 a month in child support for Tamara and Anne. The checks seldom came, and when they did they were for far less than the agreed-upon amount. Charlotte filed for bankruptcy in the spring of 2001, and she and her daughters had to live apart for four months; Charlotte's credit rating was so bad that she couldn't rent an apartment. She took to selling Roscoe's tennis hardware to pay bills. The 1977 Australian Open trophy fetched $10,000, less a 15% commission. The 1981 Davis Cup trophy went for only $1,900.

In May 2001 Tanner was arrested on court during another senior event, outside Atlanta, because he was delinquent in his payments to Charlotte. He spent a night in jail for "willful criminal contempt of court" and was released after paying $8,000. Two months later another warrant was issued for him on the same charge, though he was not arrested on it.

By then Tanner had vowed to friends that he was "starting a new life." He and Margaret had relocated to Florida's Gulf Coast, where he took a job as tennis pro at the Treasure Island Tennis and Yacht Club, near St. Petersburg. The pay was good, the housing was cheap, and he still believed he could somehow make a go of the Tanner Tennis Villages. He had also been seduced by another beauty with a sleek figure—this one 32-feet long.

Tanner ogled the Wellcraft yacht, priced at $39,000, and envisioned himself cruising the gulf with Margaret. In the summer of 2000 he gave the broker, Gene Gammon, a $3,000 deposit, and then he dropped off a check for $35,595—which, Tanner claims, he expected would clear after a tennis-related deal he was working on in Atlanta came through. The deal didn't pan out. "Here was the big star," says Gammon. "I never thought he couldn't afford it."

Gammon was told by his bank that the check had cleared. He gave Tanner title to *Nora's Cruisin'* and paid the manufacturer. Then he learned that, in fact, his bank had made a mistake. Tanner's check had bounced. When he pursued Tanner, he discovered a problem: Tanner had already used the boat as collateral to secure a $10,000 loan from a joint in a strip mall that charged 10% interest per month. Not only was Gammon out the money, but the mall lenders now superseded him as creditors.

Tanner offered to pay Gammon from his ATP pension, which would begin paying him $880 a month in January 2001, the year Tanner would turn 50. Gammon declined. Then, he says, Tanner showed him a receipt indicating that he had paid the money he owed to court authorities. (Tanner denies this.) When Gammon followed up, he says, he found that the receipt was not authentic. Gammon then learned that Tanner had taken a leave from his job at Treasure Island. Having taken a hit of more than $35,000, Gammon had to sell stocks he owned and was eventually forced to sell his brokerage business.

"The guy came in here with a smile," says Gammon, now a broker for another company, "and he damn near ruined me."

Leonard (with Roscoe and Anne) was once his son's biggest booster.

"It's tough," Roscoe says of his rift with Leonard. "He felt it was time for me to FACE THINGS MYSELF."

THERE WAS one man who could make Roscoe's debts disappear and ease a lot of the heartache he had caused. Leonard Tanner had been devastated when his wife died of a heart attack in 1983. But he soldiered on, remarrying and leaving his law practice to become CEO of a tire company. Through it all he remained a pillar of Chattanooga society and a doting father. In 1990 Roscoe was inducted into a regional tennis hall of fame in Atlanta, and he asked his father to give the presenting speech. Leonard delivered a 45-minute filibuster lauding his only son. "Leonard," says Dell, "always thought Roscoe walked on water."

When Roscoe first started to court trouble, Leonard came to the rescue, giving him money and working with Chattanooga lawyers and judges to get him off the hook. But eventually Leonard cut his prodigal son loose. He would put some money in the prison commissary fund so Roscoe could buy a razor or a toothbrush, but that was the extent of his contribution. There were times when Roscoe was so destitute that he could afford neither bail nor a lawyer. He got no help from Pop.

Asked about his father, Roscoe loses his smile, and an awkward silence ensues. "It's tough," he says. "He felt that he bailed me out and it didn't stop the problems, and it was time for me to face things myself."

Leonard is 89 now, and though he recently had to give up his tennis, he still cuts a dignified, lawyerly figure. And he sticks by his decision. "There came a time when I thought maybe I was doing Roscoe a disservice by trying to handle everything," he says. "He made an error. I let him handle the error, and I believe it has worked out. I think the unfortunate things he suffered have worked to his advantage. He's a wonderful boy, you know."

IT'S A SURREAL narrative any way you slice it. But it would make a lot more sense if Tanner had an obvious vice. Innumerable athletes have descended into darkness because of drug habits, but Tanner says that though he dabbled in cocaine after retiring from the men's tour, he never had a drug problem—a claim supported even by those who have the biggest

COURTESY OF CHARLOTTE TANNER

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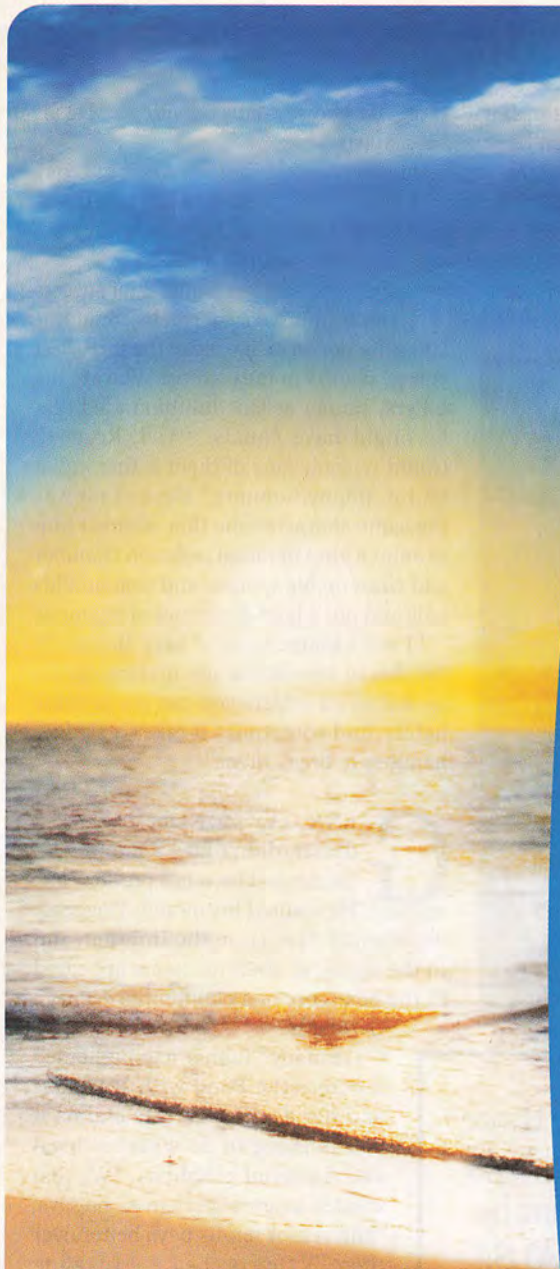

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bones to pick with him. Other athletes have gambled away their millions, but no one can recall Tanner so much as joining a card game. Greed wasn't his motivation, either. The stakes involved in Tanner's schemes were not stunningly high.

Finding plausible explanations for Tanner's behavior has become something of a parlor game in tennis circles. Bill Scanlon, a contemporary of Tanner's on the men's tour, wonders whether Tanner isn't simply a spoiled kid who panicked when the money ran out. Others surmise that there is an alter ego that Tanner successfully suppressed during his playing career. "Maybe it's a *Three Faces of Eve* thing," says Ralston, his old coach. "The Roscoe Tanner I knew not taking care of his kids? That blows me away." Charlotte Tanner thinks that the death of her ex-husband's mother triggered some deep psychological reaction.

Provided a summary of Tanner's behavior, a prominent sports psychologist says without hesitating, "Sounds like a sociopath—definitely some pathology." Tanner says he periodically sought counseling to help him deal with his financial and family problems ("Frankly," he says, "it didn't help") but has never been given a psychological diagnosis.

He has his own thoughts on his case. "My vice was selfishness," he says, "but I had an amazing ability to compartmentalize. Things would be eating at me, so much that I had this recurring dream that my body was filled with worms. But I could block it out. I'd just brush people and problems and responsibilities to the side. That's what tennis players do, right? They block out distractions."

He might be on to something. It's become an article of faith that sports build character, that they teach universal virtues. What if that's not always the case? What if the very traits that make some athletes successful get lost in translation when they are applied to life?

Besides that pump-action serve, Tanner's greatest asset as a player was his consistency. He never went through a prolonged slump. He would lose in the first round one week and then win the next tournament. "When I'd lose, I'd put it out of my mind," he says. "Other guys would lose and analyze what they did wrong. My attitude was, I'll just move on to the next match." When the summonses arrived and the past-due notices came and investors called asking what had happened to their money, Tanner treated them as distractions. Block them out and they'll go away.

Few athletes were more positive than Tanner. "Roscoe didn't see his glass as half full, he saw it as overflowing," says former U.S. Open champion Stan Smith, a contemporary of Tanner's who remains in touch with him. "He had supreme confidence. He always thought he was going to win."

The pie-in-the-sky business ventures? The promises to repay money he didn't have? The loan at 10% monthly interest? "It was totally flawed thinking," Tanner says, "but I honestly thought that somehow, some way, I was going to pull it off."

Tanner had the self-absorption that is all but required for success in individual sports. Gould, the Stanford coach, recalls congratulating Tanner on being one of the three best college players in the country. Who are the others, Tanner asked, dumbfounded that he might have equals. "Well, Roscoe," Gould replied, "one of them is that kid at UCLA, Jimmy Connors." Maybe that was the same characteristic that enabled him to enter a kind of moral isolation chamber and cheat on his spouses and abandon his kids and put a boat dealer out of business.

"I don't blame tennis," says Tanner. "I did this to myself. I'm not making excuses. But as an athlete you can get in some habits, and sometimes it takes a sledgehammer to break them."

At Stanford, Tanner helped create a national tennis power.

Told he was one of the three best college players, Tanner was dumbfounded that he MIGHT HAVE EQUALS.

GENE GAMMON, the duped boat dealer, didn't give a damn who Tanner had been in a previous life. He wanted his money. Doggedly he followed Tanner on the Internet, and in the spring of 2003 his name appeared in the box score of a club tennis event in Germany.

Germany? Tanner had hightailed it across the Pond with Margaret and her daughters. (He claims it had nothing to do with his legal and financial problems. "We just wanted a new experience," he says, "and senior tennis pays better over there.") He coached a struggling British pro, gave some lessons in France, played for a club team in Germany. Gammon alerted sportswriters in Europe, who called authorities in Florida to ask about Tanner's situation and revealed his whereabouts. Tanner was arrested on an extradition order and taken to a jail in the Black Forest town of Karlsruhe.

He has few fond recollections of his six weeks in a German jail cell. The food was so vile that he often ate with his eyes closed. Walls were covered with anti-American graffiti. Inmates were permitted only two showers a week. And he feared that another prisoner would try to make a name for himself by slipping a knife into the gut of the American.

There was, however, one amenity. The televisions in the cells received more than 30 channels. One Sunday morning Tanner flipped to a broadcast of the Reverend Robert Schuller's *Hour of Power*. As Schuller read from Philippians, Tanner found it in his Bible and followed along: *Rejoice in the Lord always. Rejoice, let*

STANFORD UNIVERSITY

daughters Lauren, Tamara and Anne were all living in the L.A. area. Maybe he could reconnect with them.

Slowly, the clouds are lifting. He's worked out some payment plans to start chipping away at his debts, which total more than $400,000. He plans to play doubles in a few upcoming senior events. He's continued reading his Bible and attending church, and he says he's working on his autobiography. He's surrounded himself with an AA-style "accountability team" to make sure he doesn't waver in his resolve. In a series of interviews with SI, he is nothing if not contrite about his past. He's begun to repair his relationship with Leonard, whom he calls on the telephone. And he's on good terms again with Lauren, a 22-year-old senior at Vanderbilt. "My dad never had to grow up until age 50," she says. "If I didn't see a major change, he wouldn't be back in my life."

In October, Margaret arrived with her daughters, vowing to give Roscoe a last shot. Immediately she took over the practical details of his life, making the car payments on their Ford Explorer and seeing that other bills get paid on time.

By all accounts it's worked well. What hacker wouldn't want to take pointers from a serving demon who nearly won Wimbledon? James Dolan, the New York Knicks' owner, recently took five lessons from Tanner. Every week more of his time is booked. "The members think the world of Roscoe," says Spearman. "He's a great guy, a great teacher. Boy, he can really carry on and tell a million stories."

These days Tanner teaches tennis in Southern California.

EVERYONE LIKES a happy ending. This saga may get one, but we're not there yet. Tanner still hasn't gotten together with Tamara and Anne, who live a few miles from him but remain wounded by Dad's disappearing act and the welter of excuses he gave. Tanner claims that Charlotte is standing between him and his daughters, but she points out that Tamara is in college and not subject to her control. "I still can't figure him out, just leaving us and never coming back," says Tamara, a thoughtful, earnest sophomore at Loyola Marymount, where she got a full ride to play tennis. "Two plus two doesn't equal four with him." Last month Tanner sought a reduction of his alimony and child support obligation to Tamara and Anne.

What's more, in September, Tanner was arrested at a doughnut shop in Laguna Niguel after missing a scheduled New Jersey court appearance in the Romano matter. (He was released and appeared in court in early September.) "It's always the same thing with that guy," says Bob Lang, a Somerset County, N.J., prosecutor. "He agrees to meet obligations, he fails to meet them and then he disappears."

Nor does Roscoe have a relationship with his 10-year-old daughter by Romano. "He has done so much damage to that girl," says Romano, now an artist living in New Jersey. "She asked him for a photograph because she wanted to draw her father. Nothing. He promised to give her a tennis lesson. Nothing. He promised her a teddy bear. Nothing. As far as I'm concerned, he's a loser."

And if Tanner hasn't been run out from the tennis fraternity, he is on something akin to double secret probation. The unpaid loans from many of his former colleagues are part of it. But opinion in the seniors' locker room really shifted when evidence mounted that Tanner was neglecting his kids. "We like the guy, we want to see him get his life together, but we also want to see him take care of his family," says Stockton, whose wife, Liz, remains friendly with Charlotte Tanner. "The whole thing makes all of us who have known him sick."

Tanner knows that he has a lot of accounting to do, that not all of his debts are financial ones. But he didn't hit rock bottom all at once, and he thinks his climb back will be gradual, too. "People always say, 'It's day by day,' but really that's what it is with me. There was so much cloudy thinking, so many decisions that any sane person could see were crazy. I went to a pretty good school. I was supposed to be pretty intelligent. Look at me now: I have no money, no credit. But you know what? I'm happier now than I ever was in my tennis career. When I won the Australian Open, I was happy for about 10 minutes. There are not those empty spots now. Do I know where this is all going? No. But I know this: I'm through running."

> "Look at me now," he says. "I have no money, no credit. But I'm happier than I was IN MY TENNIS CAREER."

These days you can catch Tanner in Laguna Niguel, usually on one of the eight courts at Spearman's Tennis Club at Monarch Beach, a swank stucco complex where the air is perfumed by breezes from the nearby Pacific. A sheen of sweat on his forehead, Tanner wields a scarlet Wilson racket and tells housewives, kids, seniors—whoever comes through the door—to bend their knees for that volley or shorten that backswing or follow through by pointing at the target. He's charming and energetic, and if he warms up, he can still crank a 120-mph serve.

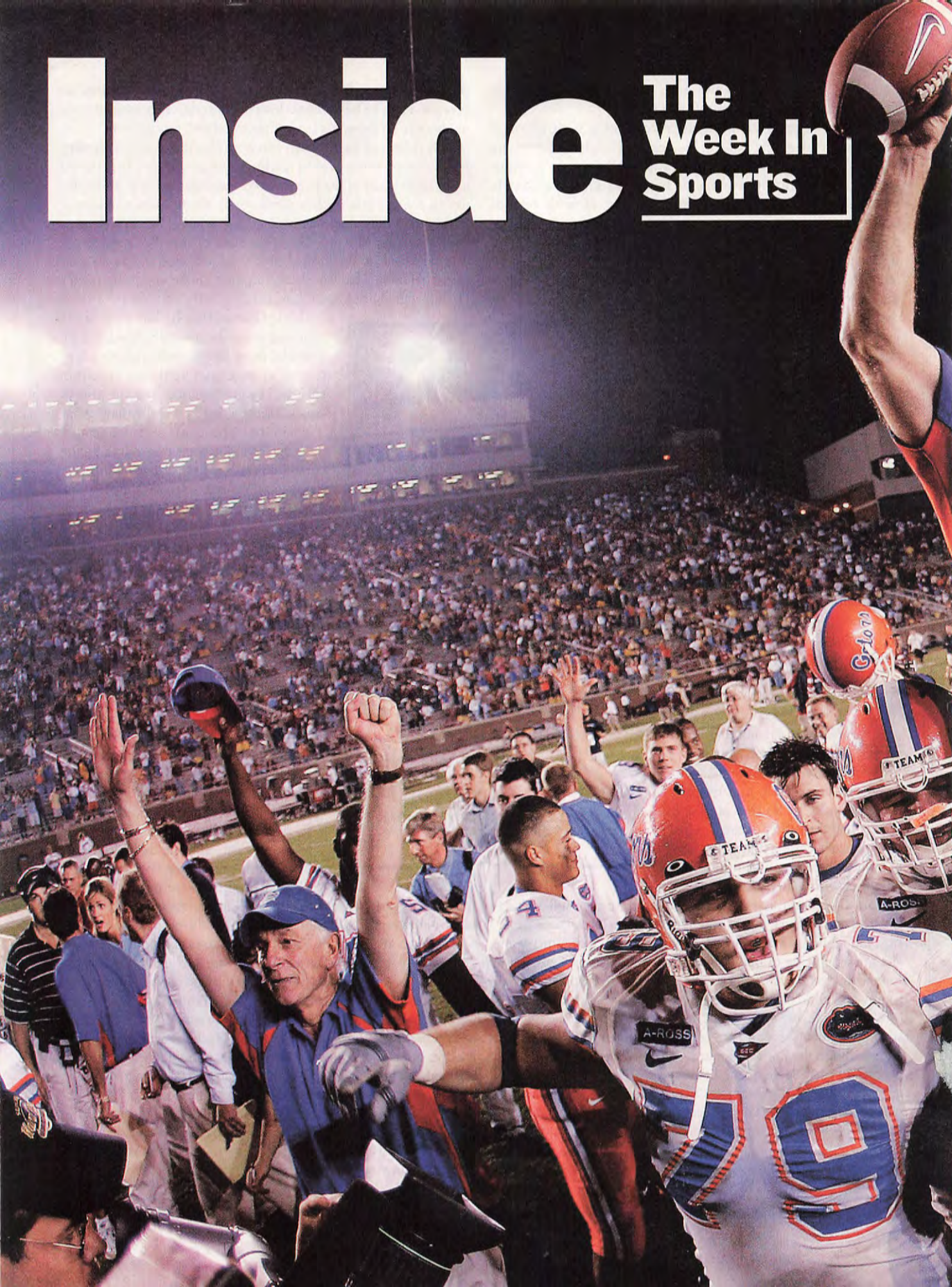
Late one afternoon in October, as palms cast long shadows across the court, Tanner is giving a private lesson to his prize student, Stefan Simikic, a 15-year-old with big-time potential. They play a series of tiebreakers. At one point Tanner grooves a serve that recalls the mop-haired pro from Tennessee. Simikic sticks a return back, and the two players, a Wimbledon finalist and a Wimbledon hopeful, rally for a dozen strokes. Simikic bats the ball to the middle of the court, and Tanner is in prime position to chip and charge. But he dumps an easy forehand into the net.

"You had me right where you wanted me!" the kid says, laughing. Tanner, too, laughs at his error. He picks up the ball, stuffs it in his pocket and retreats to the baseline to play the next point, at once in plain view and obscured by shadows. □

DAVID STRICK

Inside

The Week In Sports



COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Freshman Ted Ginn gives Ohio State hope • The year's most underrated players • Spurrier back in the SEC

GOLF

Vijay Singh is SI's Player of the Year • The PGA Tour's anticipated youth movement never materialized in 2004

THE NFL

McGahee gives the Bills' offense a lift • Seahawks rookie comes up big at a new position • Ravens' Boller passes test

WON AND DONE Outgoing Florida coach Ron Zook accomplished something even his celebrated predecessor, Steve Spurrier (page 80), couldn't: He led the Gators to victory in Tallahassee, beating Florida State 20–13 last Saturday.

Photograph by Donald Miralle/Getty Images

SEEING RED Smith (inset) and Ginn often left Michigan defenders grasping at air.

Electrifying

With Maurice Clarett's accusations casting a shadow, freshman Ted Ginn has been a bright spot for Ohio State

FORGIVE OHIO STATE freshman Ted Ginn for not getting too riled over Maurice Clarett's recent disparaging comments about the Buckeyes' program. "Ted knows about the guy but doesn't know the guy," explains Rasul Spain, a high school teammate who spent last weekend visiting Ginn, his childhood best friend, in Columbus. "So all of those headlines just didn't matter that much to him."

Yet credit must go to Ohio State's newest phenom for chasing away, if only momentarily, the Buckeyes' ghost of freshmen past. After a week in which water-cooler talk centered on Clarett, who claimed in *ESPN the Magazine* that he had been given a bogus job and free cars as an OSU rookie in 2002, the weekend's buzz revolved around Ginn, whose electric play propelled Ohio State (7–4, 4–4 in the Big Ten) to a 37–21 stunner over archrival and conference co-champ Michigan (9–2, 7–1). "He has everything," says Wolverines senior cornerback Marlin Jackson, "that a team could want in a player."

Everything is the operative word when describing Ginn. Playing under his dad, Ted Sr., at Glenville High in Cleveland, Ginn shifted among quarterback, wide receiver, cornerback, kick returner and punt returner, depending on where a big play was needed. He signed with the Buckeyes expecting to play corner, where last season he earned *USA Today* defensive player of the year honors. But it soon became apparent that Ginn, a 6-foot 170-pounder, could make a bigger impact in Ohio State's playmaker-starved attack. "He's not just fast, he's fearless," says defensive backs coach Mel Tucker. "Every challenge we've thrown at him, he's welcomed."

Ginn's development as a receiver and return man has coincided with the Buckeyes' climb from an 0–3 conference start. At Michigan State on Nov. 6, the freshman raised eyebrows by scoring touchdowns three ways (run, punt return and reception), as Ohio State put up a then-season-high point total in a 32–19 win. With Ginn again dominating last Saturday, the Buckeyes had their highest point total against the Wolverines in 36 years. Along with sophomore quarterback Troy Smith, a former high school teammate who passed for 241 yards and rushed for 145 more, Ginn toasted a veteran Wolverines secondary for five catches and a team-high 85 yards. Early in the third quarter the freshman evaded four Michigan players en route to an 82-yard punt return touchdown—his NCAA-record-tying fourth of the season—which put Ohio State up 27–14 and marked a momentum shift from which the Wolverines couldn't recover. Said Smith, "He's the spark plug in our car."

After the game Smith, Ginn, Spain and safety Donte Whitner hopped in a real car and headed to Cleveland, where they cheered their alma mater in a state regional final win over crosstown rival Saint Ignatius. "It'll probably give them another step," said Ginn of the Glenville players, "just to know that Ted Ginn or Troy Smith is in the stadium."

That comment could apply to the Buckeyes' young offense as well. Though the program faces scrutiny by the NCAA, between the lines Ohio State's future has just gotten a little brighter.

Three and Out

1 **Missouri** has been the biggest flop of the season. Vaunted quarterback **Brad Smith**, a 1,400-yard rusher last year, has become a nonfactor in coach Gary Pinkel's conservative offense, and the Tigers, a preseason Top 20 team, have lost five straight games.

2 Please, BCS commissioners, do whatever it takes to make sure **Utah** plays a similarly ranked team in its bowl game. Fans would love to see how the Utes' high-powered offense fares against an Oklahoma or Auburn, but Utah might get stuck facing Boston College.

3 No one should be more scared of Urban Meyer's possibly going to Florida than Florida State's **Bobby Bowden.** While Meyer is known for offensive wizardry, the Noles' offense has become an embarrassment under Bowden's son Jeff. —*Stewart Mandel*

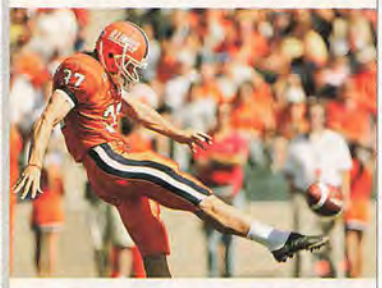
DAMIAN STROHMEYER (GINN); AL TIELEMANS (SMITH)

SIX UNSUNG STARS

The Most Underrated

Fans are well acquainted with the college game's biggest names, such as Matt Leinart and Jason White. There are, however, 10,000 other Division I-A players, and plenty of them also deserve recognition. Here are the most underrated players from each of the six BCS conferences. (To Louisville and Utah and all other mid-major schools outside the BCS: In our eyes every one of your players is underrated.)

ACC: *Alvin Pearman, tailback, Virginia.* The 5' 9", 204-pound senior has done a bit of everything for the Cavaliers. His average of 159.4 all-purpose yards is the 13th best in Division I-A. He's Virginia's leading rusher and punt returner as well as its second-leading receiver. Though he began the year backing up Wali Lundy, Pearman took over after the Cavs gained just 20 yards on the ground in an embarrassing 36–3 loss to Florida State on Oct. 16. He has run for 582 yards in the four games since.



GOLDEN BOOT Illinois punter Weatherford has done his part to help the struggling Illini.

Big East: *Brian Leonard, fullback, Rutgers.* A 6' 2", 230-pounder in the mold of John Riggins, the sophomore ran for 150 yards in the Scarlet Knights' 19–14 upset of Michigan State on Sept. 4. Leonard has also displayed remarkable talent as a receiver: He leads all Division I-A running backs with 6.1 receptions per game and has caught eight or more passes on three occasions. Leonard has gained more than 100 all-purpose yards in 14 straight games, and his average of 127.0 yards is second in the conference.

Big Ten: *Steve Weatherford, punter, Illinois.* The junior is the main reason the Illini—who excel at almost nothing else—are second in the Big Ten (and 12th in the nation) in net punting, averaging 39.0 yards per kick. Weatherford's 45.4 yards per boot ranks fourth in Division I-A. He has pinned 23 of 57 punts inside the 20-yard line and has 20 punts of 50 yards or more, including a 79-yard bomb against Iowa on Oct. 30. Only 39% of his punts this year have been returned.

Big 12: *Charles Gordon, cornerback, Kansas.* The Jayhawks' defense has 19 interceptions, tied for second most in Division I-A. Gordon, a 5' 11", 170-pound sophomore, has seven, tied for first in the nation. The holder of the Kansas freshman records for receptions and receiving yards, Gordon switched from wideout to cornerback this fall because coaches thought his speed and quickness made him ideal for the position. He still sees some time on offense and is the Jayhawks' punt returner.

Pac-10: *Lorenzo Alexander, defensive tackle, California.* The 6' 3", 300-pound senior has been the mainstay of the country's No. 4 rush defense. His statistics aren't flashy—he has just 23 tackles and 1½ sacks—but that's because opponents either run away from him or double-team him. By drawing an extra blocker, Alexander has opened the way for Cal defensive end Ryan Riddle to make a Pac-10–leading 12½ sacks.

SEC: *Freddie Roach, linebacker, Alabama.* The 6' 2", 239-pound junior is listed as a middle linebacker—it's where he played the last two seasons—but this fall the hard-hitting Roach has also lined up at outside linebacker and defensive end. The shuffling has caused his numbers to dip some, but he is still fourth on the team in tackles (39) and tackles-for-loss (six). —*Mark Beech*

Phil Taylor's Sidelines

SPURRIER RETURNS TO SEC

Disgruntled Florida fans are directing their wrath at athletic director **Jeremy Foley**, who is taking the brunt of the blame for not luring ex-coach **Steve Spurrier** *(above)* back to Gainesville. Making matters worse is that Spurrier will take over SEC East rival South Carolina. "I haven't been overwhelmed by negative e-mails," Foley says, acknowledging that he has received some, "but that sentiment is out there." Maybe some of those missives should go to school president **Bernie Machen**; rumor has it that Spurrier pulled his name out of the running because Machen wants to consider Utah coach **Urban Meyer**, and Spurrier didn't feel he should have to compete for his old office. If Spurrier did feel snubbed, Florida fans' misery could be just beginning: It may not be long before the Ol' Ball Coach is running up the score on the Gators at the Swamp.

LONG TIME COMING

Earlier in the season many critics, including this one, suggested that Miami should give up on inconsistent senior **Brock Berlin** and begin playing one of its younger quarterbacks. But coach **Larry Coker** didn't make the switch, and Berlin *(right)* has rewarded him with the finest season of the QB's career. After throwing for 361 yards, four touchdowns and no interceptions in a 52–7 win over Wake Forest on Saturday, Berlin has 21 TD passes and only four interceptions this year, and he hasn't been picked off in his last 153 attempts, a remarkable turnaround in light of the 17 picks he threw last season. Offensive coordinator **Dan Werner** has helped Berlin break his habit of locking in on his primary receiver, but the biggest reason for Berlin's comeback may be his resiliency. "He's a tough kid," says Werner. "People outside the program may have lost faith in him, but he didn't lose faith in himself."

THE BELLE OF THE BALL

Representatives of a few smaller bowls may secretly be hoping that their conference tie-ins fall through, because there's an independent team they would love to invite: Navy. The Midshipmen, who could finish 9–2, are the poor-man's Notre Dame—an unaffiliated school with a national following that would sell tickets and attract a large TV audience. "Navy is like the cute girl sitting in the corner that everybody's courting," says Las Vegas Bowl executive director Tina Kunzer-Murphy. If USC and California go to BCS bowls as expected, the Pac-10, for instance, won't have enough teams with the required six wins to fulfill commitments to the Las Vegas, Emerald and Silicon Valley bowls. That would leave those games with an open slot, and any one would be happy to have fullback **Kyle Eckel** *(above)* and Navy drop anchor there.

AL TIELEMANS (WEATHERFORD); BILL WILLCOX, THE HERALD SUN/AP (SPURRIER); WARREN ZINN/US PRESSWIRE (BERLIN); DAMON J. MORITZ/U.S. NAVY/GETTY IMAGES (ECKEL)

by Michael Bamberger

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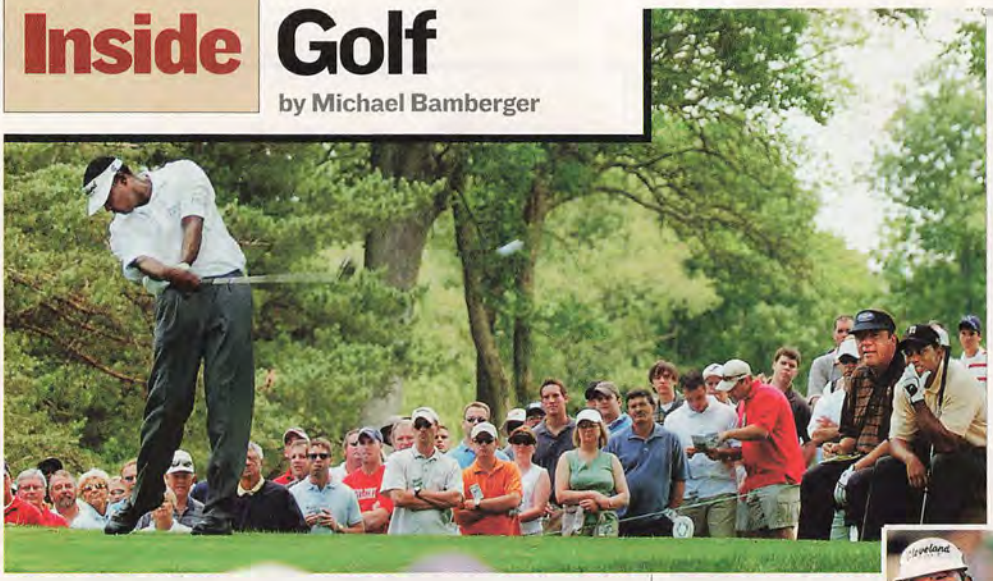

Old Master

Nine-time winner Vijay Singh, SI's Player of the Year, proved beyond doubt that age is no barrier to success

AGE DOESN'T matter anymore. Or it doesn't have to, anyway. Why do you think they keep running those Levitra ads during golf telecasts? Hale Irwin, 59, won the Senior PGA Championship and finished second on the Champions tour's money list. A 50-year-old golfer, Jay Haas, played well enough to make the U.S. Ryder Cup team. Meg Mallon, at 41, won the U.S. Women's Open, and a fellow member of the birth class of '63, Vijay Singh, won nine times on the PGA Tour. If you have the drive—and the right equipment, exercise routine and diet—being middle-aged and older is almost irrelevant in pro golf right now. Check that: It's a good thing!

Desire, Singh will tell you, is the most important factor. Singh didn't need more money. What he wanted was the respect that comes from being the best. An old cheating episode—as a broke 22-year-old pro at the 1985 Indonesian Open, he was caught fudging his second-round scorecard—made him an untouchable to some touring pros for years. Now he's a different kind of untouchable. He's the envy of every obsessive ball-beater who truly believes the answer is in the headcover-under-the-armpit practice routine.

He ascended to the throne on Labor Day. Perfect. That his nemesis, Tiger Woods, had to watch the whole thing up close? Too much.

By arrangement with the Screenwriters Guild, Vijay and Tiger were paired together in the last group for the final round of the Deutsche Bank Championship, played outside Boston. On the first Monday in September, Woods was still clinging to his No. 1 ranking. Singh, bolstered by his peculiar win at the PGA Championship in August (final-round 76), was No. 2.

DRIVE TO NO. 1 Singh surpassed Woods (above right) as the world's best on Labor Day.

Their meeting that day was to decide who would be the No. 1 player in the world. This is the kind of thing Tiger has always lived for. He had other incentives, too. There's no love lost between Woods and Singh, who dissed Tiger's friend Annika Sorenstam when she signed on to play in a PGA Tour event in 2003. Also, whatever Tiger won that week, he was giving to his charity. He was playing for more than himself.

Through 13 holes they were tied for the lead. It was Tiger Time. You remember Tiger Time. That's when he steps on his opponent's neck and raises his putter high in the air, humiliating the poor bastard.

Not this time. Without director approval, the two men reversed roles: Woods played the final five holes in even par, while Singh made birdies on 15, 17 and 18 to win by three strokes. At 41, Singh became the oldest golfer ever to rise to No. 1. None of the next-day stories bothered to note the age thing. There was no need to. By then everyone knew: In golf, a game with no defense, the ball doesn't care how old you are.

Singh's amazing year—only Ben Hogan, Byron Nelson and Sam Snead have won more Tour events in a single season—has earned him our nod as SI's Player of the Year. It did not get his face on a Wheaties box, as Woods's 2000 season did. Part of that can be attributed to Singh's manner. He sort of moseys along between shots, seemingly in some dream state in which there's nothing to worry about and nothing but time. Woods won three majors in 2000, each fiercely, and had 10 wins in four countries. Some of Singh's nine wins, all in North America, were in unglamorous locales such as a housing development in Houston and a rural outpost in western Pennsylvania. The fields were sparkly at neither. Even his win at tony Pebble Beach was done against a mediocre field.

But the money totals do not lie. Singh, with $10.9 million, won nearly as much as Ernie Els (No. 2 on the money list) and Phil Mickelson (No. 3) combined. All Singh did in 2004 was run the table, supplant young Tiger, secure a place in the Hall of Fame—and take another step toward burying his past. □

Seniority

Insiders predicted a youth movement on the PGA Tour in 2004. Instead, the average age of winners was a salty 35.3 years. The average age of the winners of the major championships was even older.

	MASTERS	AGE	U.S. OPEN	AGE	BRITISH	AGE	PGA	AGE	AVG. AGE
2000	Vijay Singh	37	Tiger Woods	24	Tiger Woods	24	Tiger Woods	24	27.25
2001	Tiger Woods	25	Retief Goosen	32	David Duval	29	David Toms	34	30.00
2002	Tiger Woods	26	Tiger Woods	26	Ernie Els	32	Rich Beem	31	28.75
2003	Mike Weir	32	Jim Furyk	33	Ben Curtis	26	Shaun Micheel	34	31.25
2004	Phil Mickelson	33	Retief Goosen	35	Todd Hamilton	38	Vijay Singh	41	36.75

FRED VUICH; TONY GUTIERREZ/AP (INSET)

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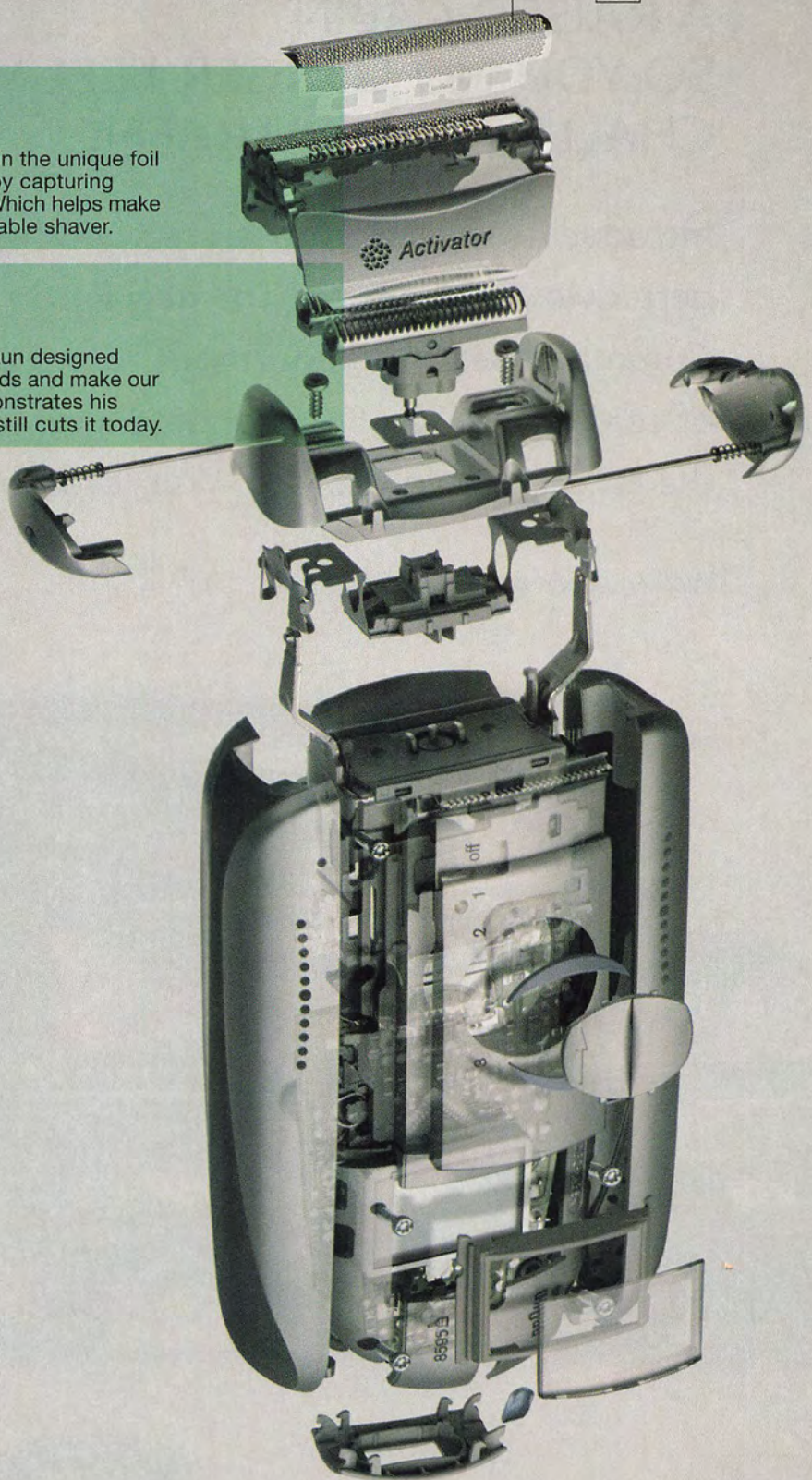

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your gentleness be evident to all! The Lord is near. Don't be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to the Lord.

Tanner was rapt. He mulled over the passage and then thought about the train wreck that was his life. As he later put it to a friend, "I knew I was tired of going Roscoe's way. I'd either spent, lost or signed over all of my money. But that wasn't enough: I had ripped off friends, innocent acquaintances and creditors on two continents. I had cheated on two wives and failed miserably as a father."

He knelt beside his bed and prayed. Prayed that he would repent. Prayed that he would find peace. And while he was at it, he prayed that the Lord would take care of the rash he had had on his wrist for years. A few days later he took a shower. When he dried off, he noticed that the rash was gone. A few days after that a guard told him that he had been extradited to the U.S.

> In prison he read the Bible and even found something redeeming in his job CLEANING TOILETS.

Unable to scrounge up bail money, Tanner spent 17 weeks in the rough Pinellas County, Fla., jail, where the inmates, most of them black, jokingly nicknamed him Deejay because he couldn't rap. In November 2003 Tanner pleaded guilty to grand theft and was sentenced to probation until he makes good on his debt to Gammon. (The current payment plan calls for Tanner to fork over $102,000 in capital and interest over 10 years. To do that, he signed over to Gammon his ATP pension payments beginning in January 2006.) Then he served five months in a county jail in Somerset, N.J., for failure to make payments due to Romano. He claims that at times he felt it was good for him to be locked up. He had been reading the Bible and helping other inmates learn to read. He even found something redeeming about his prison job cleaning toilets.

After Tanner was released, on April 19, he stayed with friends and relatives in various places—Washington, D.C., Florida, Georgia—but eventually California beckoned. In the state for court appearances, he shuttled along the corridor between L.A. and San Diego, crashing with assorted friends from Stanford and the tennis caravan—10 days in this vacant guesthouse, a week in that basement. Eventually he crossed paths with Cecil Spearman, a silver-haired former Marine who played tennis at Duke in the 1950s, made a killing in business and runs three upscale tennis clubs in Orange County. Spearman asked a few dozen members what they'd think if he hired Tanner. The responses were "overwhelmingly positive," he says, so he called Tanner to his office at the Laguna Niguel Racket Club, explained that there would be no second chances and offered him a job giving lessons at $65 an hour. Tanner jumped at it.

Isn't California where everyone gets a fresh start? And his

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by Jeffri Chadiha

A Cut Above

Healthy at last, explosive running back Willis McGahee has given the Bills' offense a much-needed boost

WITH JUST five minutes left in his team's 37–17 victory over the Rams on Sunday, Bills running back Willis McGahee started talking statistics with left tackle Jonas Jennings. While waiting on the field to huddle with his teammates, McGahee told Jennings that he had rushed for 84 yards. Jennings understood what McGahee was getting at—16 more yards and the second-year back would have his fourth 100-yard day in his last six games. "We had to get it," Jennings said later. "We take a lot of pride in getting 100 yards, and we weren't going to take a knee until Willis got there."

McGahee got his 100 yards (on 20 carries) on a day when the Bills showed how far they've come since he replaced Travis Henry as the team's feature back, on Oct. 17. Watch the Buffalo offense these days, and you'll see that Drew Bledsoe is a more efficient quarterback who's more comfortable in the pocket. A suspect line is more cohesive. And defenses are having a harder time figuring out how to scheme against the Bills. The Rams were so focused on shutting down McGahee that other Bills had big games. Tight end Mark Campbell was the brightest star, scoring touchdowns on three of his four receptions.

With the victory, the Bills improved to 4–6. It was Buffalo's fourth win in six games, a run that coincides with McGahee's insertion into the lineup. "I think I've taken pressure off the quarterbacks and the receivers," he says. "I've given them a chance to open things up because defenses have had to concentrate on the run."

GROUND HOG On Sunday, McGahee hit the century mark for the fourth time in six games.

McGahee has impressed teammates and opponents with his array of skills. Some rave about his vision. Others talk about his patience. But most of all, McGahee has impressed people with his punishing running style. At 6 feet, 228 pounds, he's bigger than Henry (5' 9", 215), and he consistently gains yards after contact. "Willis has the size to make some very good three- to four-yard runs," says Bills offensive coordinator Tom Clements. "And that's a big deal when it's third-and-three, and he gets four yards on a play that's blocked for one or two yards. People look at 30- or 40-yard runs as being big, but if you're in a tight game and you're trying to grind out the clock, you need a guy who can get you tough yards. Willis can do that."

That's a big reason why the Bills took McGahee with the 23rd pick in the 2003 draft, knowing he would miss the season after tearing three ligaments in his left knee playing for Miami in the Fiesta Bowl that January. At minicamps before this season he still had a slight limp, and his running style was best described as tentative. McGahee looked more confident after several goal line rushes during a training camp scrimmage with the Browns, but he opened the season behind Henry on the depth chart.

Given Henry's success over the previous two seasons, when he rushed for 2,794 yards and 23 touchdowns, the decision didn't come as a surprise. (In fact, some questioned why a team that hasn't had a winning season since 1999 would use a first-round pick on a running back when it already had a productive one.) Some in the Bills' organization also weren't enamored with McGahee's practice habits. First-year coach Mike Mularkey wants his backs to get through the hole and keep running well after contact, and he harped on McGahee throughout training camp and into the season about the need to finish runs in practice. McGahee liked to hit the pile, then jog back to the huddle.

"Willis needed to learn how to practice in those first few weeks," Mularkey says. "That had a lot to do with not playing him earlier. If I can't see it in practice—if I don't know how he'll hit a hole or where he'll cut—I'm not going to wait until Sunday to find out. But I think a light went on during our open week [Sept. 26] because there was a different guy on the practice field after that."

McGahee's insertion into the starting lineup three weeks later helped the Bills establish the smashmouth style that Mularkey had been preaching since he got the job. In his third start, a 22–17 upset of the Jets, McGahee carried 37 times for 132 yards and

DAVID BERGMAN

a touchdown. "We were tackling him, hitting him, getting after him and talking a little smack, but he never got tired," says Jets linebacker Jonathan Vilma, who played with McGahee at Miami. "I thought he might wear down, but he took 37 carries and he was still cool."

McGahee says he's still not back to where he was before the injury—his breakaway speed isn't what it was at Miami—but he's pleased with the progress he and the Buffalo offense have made. "You know how some teams seem like they're waiting for something to happen and then, when it does, everything starts falling into place?" he says. "That's what I think has happened here."

SEATTLE'S PLAYMAKER

Rookie Safety Saves the Day

Seahawks safety Michael Boulware may be a rookie struggling to learn a new position, but he knows plenty about making big plays. His latest—a 63-yard interception return for a touchdown in the final minute against the Dolphins on Sunday—turned a potential defeat into a 24–17 victory and moved Seattle back ahead of the Rams and into first place in the NFC West.

TURNING THE TIDE Boulware rescued the Seahawks with his last-minute interception return.

The Seahawks had planned to make the 6' 3", 223-pound Boulware their starting strong safety after selecting him in the second round of the April draft because he had displayed exceptional speed and athleticism as an outside linebacker at Florida State. But Michael, whose older brother Peter is a Pro Bowl linebacker for the Ravens, struggled to learn defensive coordinator Ray Rhodes's system in training camp and never seriously challenged Terreal Bierria for the starting job. Instead, he has played mostly in nickel packages and on special teams.

However, limited playing time hasn't kept Boulware from making an impact. He is tied for the league lead in interceptions among rookies, with four, and three of those have helped seal victories for the Seahawks. His third-quarter pickoff in the opener against the Saints set up an insurance touchdown in a 21–7 win. The next week Boulware intercepted a Bucs pass at the Seattle 15 with 1:11 left in a 10–6 win.

Playing their first game under interim coach Jim Bates, the Dolphins were poised to pull off a major upset on Sunday. They had rallied from a 10-point second-half deficit and had a first down at the Seattle 41 when Boulware stepped in front of an A.J. Feeley slant pass. "That dude is so blessed, it's ridiculous," Seahawks running back Shaun Alexander said. "He's always in the right place at the right time."

BOLLER COMES OF AGE?

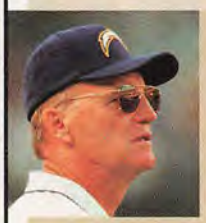
Passer Rallies Ravens to Win

Ravens quarterback Kyle Boller is making his critics think twice. On Sunday the second-year passer led Baltimore to a 30–10 win over the Cowboys while playing most of the game without injured All-Pro running back Jamal Lewis and Lewis's backup, Musa Smith. That performance came a week after Boller threw a pair

King's Corner

HOT TOPIC

It's bizarre to have the top two seeds in a conference all but wrapped up by Thanksgiving, but that's the story of the NFC in 2004. The Eagles (9–1) can clinch the NFC East on Sunday with a win over the Giants, and the Falcons (8–2) have a four-game lead in the NFC South. With only one of its final six games against a team above .500 (the Packers on Dec. 5, at home), Philadelphia is a heavy favorite to host its third straight NFC Championship Game. The question is, Can Atlanta give the Eagles a game if that's the matchup on Jan. 23? Only if daredevil quarterback Michael Vick *(above)* is still upright come January (no sure thing), if an unpredictable blitz can bug Eagles QB Donovan McNabb (it can) and if a precocious rookie corner, DeAngelo Hall, can slow the Terrell Owens Express (doubtful).



BY THE NUMBERS

Dan Snyder's handpicked greatest coaches of all time, Steve Spurrier and Joe Gibbs, are a combined 15–27 (.357). The coach Snyder just couldn't bear anymore after a lone 8–8 season in 2001, Marty Schottenheimer *(left)*, went to a bare cupboard of a team, the Chargers, where he's 19–23 (.452). Since 2002, the Redskins have one more win than the Bengals.

MATCHUP OF THE WEEK

Miami at San Francisco. How amazing is it that these two teams will go down the stretch as front-runners for the right to select the first player in next April's draft—which, in all likelihood, will be USC quarterback Matt Leinart? The teams that entered this season with the best records since the 1970 merger trail their divisions with the worst records in the NFL this year (both are 1–9). A.J. Feeley and Tim Rattay are expected to square off under center on Sunday. That's a far cry from the Dan Marino–Joe Montana matchup 20 years ago in Super Bowl XIX.

THREE POINTS

1. Terrell Owens *(right)* calls himself a religious man. I wonder what book of the Bible says, Thou shall lift and spin naked women salaciously in prime time.

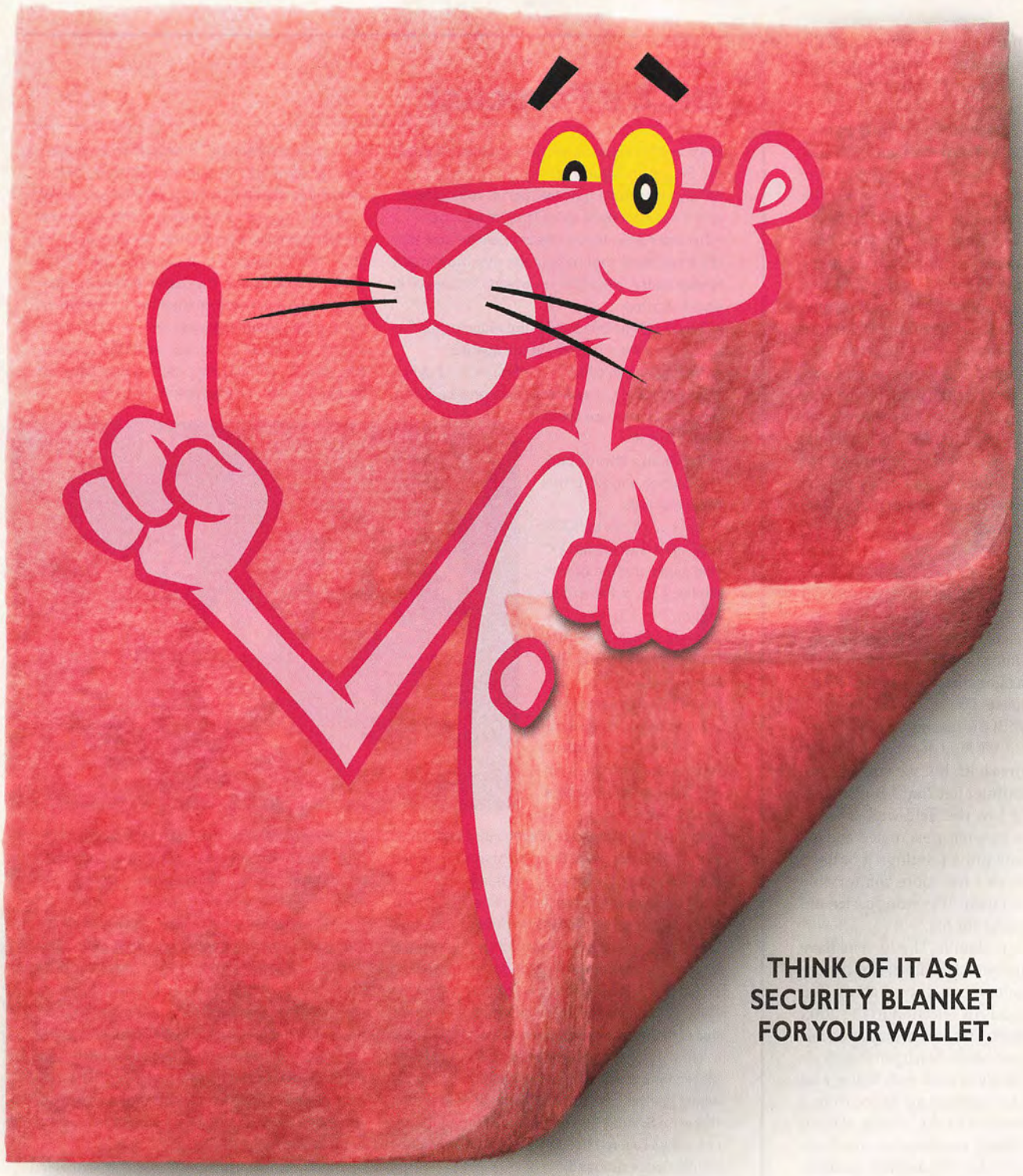
2. Is it my imagination, or does Saints quarterback Aaron Brooks make one absolutely lamebrain play every week? A couple of weeks ago it was the idiotic backward pass; on Sunday it was the underhanded flip that Broncos linebacker Al Wilson intercepted and returned for a touchdown. Brooks is doing everything he can to put coach Jim Haslett on the unemployment line.

3. No rookie trio is having as big an impact as Cardinals wideout Larry Fitzgerald, linebacker Karlos Dansby and defensive tackle Darnell Dockett.

—Peter King

Peter King's Monday Morning Quarterback, every week at **SI.com/football.**

MIKE URBAN/SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER/AP (BOULWARE); SCOTT HALLERAN/GETTY IMAGES (VICK); DOUG BENC/GETTY IMAGES (SCHOTTENHEIMER); JOELLE WIGGINS



THINK OF IT AS A SECURITY BLANKET FOR YOUR WALLET.

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of touchdown passes and directed a game-winning drive for a field goal against the Jets in overtime.

Over his past four games Boller has thrown for 810 yards and five touchdowns with one interception, and on Sunday he turned in arguably the finest performance of his young career. He completed 23 of 34 passes for 232 yards and two touchdowns while putting up a 106.5 passer rating. Baltimore trailed 3–0 at halftime but gained 163 yards to the Cowboys' 11 in the third quarter. The usually conservative Ravens put the game in Boller's hands; he responded by completing 10 of 15 passes for 142 yards and the two touchdowns in that pivotal period.

"Kyle was very confident at halftime," said Baltimore wideout Kevin Johnson, who caught a 31-yard touchdown pass. "He felt like he was in a rhythm. Anytime you have the quarterback feeling that, you have to let him loose. He did an excellent job with the pressure."

"We kind of got stalled in the first half, but we started executing after that," Boller said. "I saw the field well. The receivers ran great routes, and my line did a fabulous job. Each week I feel more comfortable out there. It's getting easier and easier for me."

It should. The Ravens have invested heavily in Boller's development since making him the 19th selection in the 2003 draft. This season they hired former Giants coach Jim Fassel primarily to work with Boller, who also receives guidance from a quarterbacks coach (David Shaw), an offensive coordinator who was an NFL quarterback (Matt Cavanaugh) and an offensive-minded head coach (Brian Billick). With all that support, Boller is finally starting to show that he can win a game instead of just not lose one. The Ravens, winners of three straight, are 7–3 for the first time in their history. □

Dr. Z's Forecast

Here are the reasons why the Giants will upset the Eagles on Sunday:

- They've found a quarterback to rally around, and it's been a while since they've had that.
- The offensive line can breathe easier now that it's freed from that ugly finger-pointing about whose fault it is that the team leads the league in sacks allowed.
- They're still steamed about the whipping the Eagles put on them in Philly in the opener.
- The Eagles can become the first team to clinch a division title by winning this game, and the Giants would love to keep them from doing it.
- The Giants always play the Eagles tough in the Meadowlands.

Last one first: In 2003 the Eagles reached the NFC title game and the Giants finished 4–12, but when they met on Oct. 19, New York strangled Philly's offense, limiting it to 134 yards. The Giants held a 10–7 lead late in the fourth quarter and had the ball in Philly territory. All they had to do was run the clock and then pin the Eagles back with a good punt.

Instead the punt took a weird bounce and stayed in the field of play, and Brian Westbrook returned it 84 yards for a touchdown with 1:16 left.

Eli Manning's debut as the Giants' starting quarterback against the Falcons on Sunday may have been an L on the scoreboard, but it was a triumph if you look at the big picture. He got sacked on his fourth snap, but that was the only time the Falcons got him. And this was against a defense that came into the game second in the NFL in sacks.

New York's linemen knew that if they held their blocks for a reasonable amount of time, Manning would get the pass off. And the passes Manning threw on Sunday had more velocity than the receivers were used to, which might be why a few of them were dropped.

But the best thing about Manning's debut was that the players seemed to get a lift from the kid. They were playing tough on both sides of the ball, and in the second half Michael Vick and the Atlanta offense were on their heels. What did Manning in? A pick from a defensive end, Brady Smith, who dropped back in a zone blitz, something Manning didn't see much of in the SEC. Then, in the last minute, Pro Bowl linebacker Keith Brooking ran a trick on Manning, showing him an uncovered receiver, tight end Jeremy Shockey, before breaking for the spot and knocking the pass away.

But that's all part of Manning's learning process. Philly's defensive coordinator, Jim Johnson, will show Manning an exotic package, but I think the Giants will beat it. The Eagles' defensive complexities couldn't stop another rookie, the Steelers' Big Ben Roethlisberger, and **I think Manning and the Giants will triumph as well.** One reservation, though. If Tiki Barber can't play because of his head injury, the Eagles are the pick.

CHARGED UP Against Philly, the Giants will play the same type of inspired football that almost delivered a win over the Falcons.

I've given you my major upset, so I'm afraid it's going to be mostly chalk from here on in. The **Bengals** will bounce back against Cleveland. The **Chiefs** will beat San Diego in Arrowhead, where they've defeated the Chargers seven straight times. Minnesota-Jacksonville is an interesting matchup, but the unsettled Jaguars' quarterback situation makes the **Vikings** the choice. The **Jets** have played in Arizona only once, eight years ago, and they won by 10. What the heck, let's give them another win in the desert.

Green Bay, which proved its toughness on Sunday night in Houston, will keep it going and whip the Rams in the Monday-nighter. Believe it or not, the Saints have won three of their last four games in Atlanta. Not this time, though. The **Falcons** are the pick. Kyle Boller is finally coming into his own under the tutelage of Jim Fassel, and the Ravens have some punch now but not enough to stop the **Patriots** in Foxborough. *—Paul Zimmerman*

Last week: 7–1 **Season: 57–38**

Dr. Z writes for the web every Wednesday, Thursday and Friday at **SI.com/nfl.**

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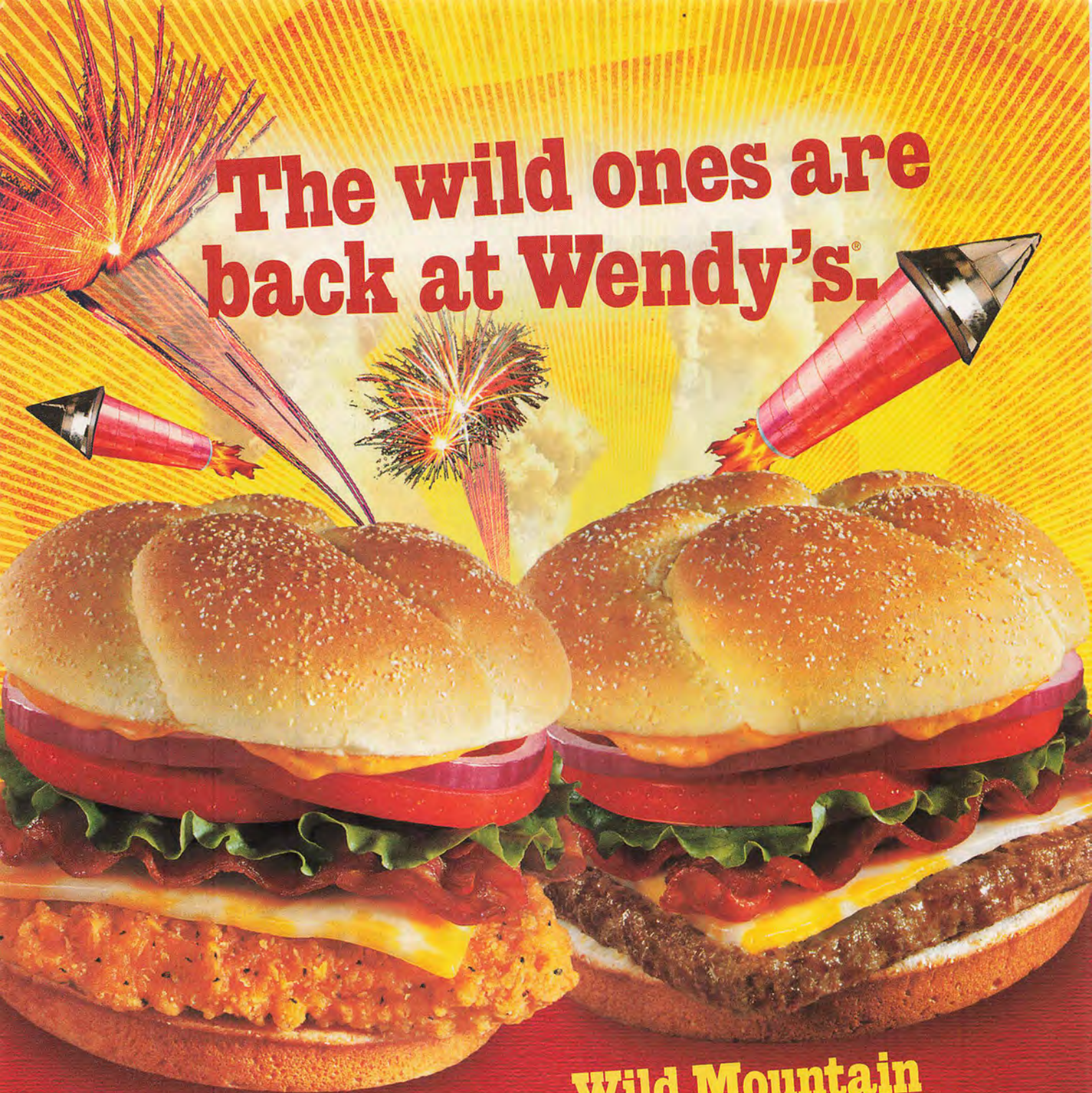

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Doing Hard Tee Time

by Rick Reilly

TRUE, 97% OF the inmates at the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola will die there. And true, they've murdered, raped or robbed. But you've got to give them their propers: They sure build a nice golf course. It's the nine-hole Prison View Golf Course, just 2½ hours north of New Orleans. This is the only golf course in the country on prison grounds, and it may be the only course in the world that requires a complete background check before you can get a tee time.

Warden: So, Mr. Kowalski, word on the street is you don't replace your divots.

Seriously, a golfer must call at least 48 hours in advance and provide his date of birth, driver's license number and Social Security number. Not allowed: convicted felons, former inmates, people on the prison's visitors' list and, of course, inmates. You call back the next day to see if you got a time. How many prisons have people calling to see if they can get *in*? Kind of gives new meaning to those old blues lines:

> *I got lucky last summer when I got my time, Angola bound.*
> *Well my partner got a hundred, I got ninety-nine, Angola bound.*

It's even weirder to drive through prison gates to play golf ($20 with cart). It's all you can do to keep from telling the guy at the security gate, "We're here for nine to 18."

Still, you never *really* feel in danger at Prison View, even though the inmates not only built it, but many of them also work the grounds, sans guards. They're trusties, which means that they've been in prison for at least seven years and have virtually spotless records inside.

One of them is Jeffrey Hawkins, who has been at Angola for 14 years, doing life for second-degree murder. It was his 38th birthday. He and his shovel could've wandered off to the highway anytime he wanted, but they didn't.

"Being outdoors in this environment is great," said Hawkins, who was putting in a cart path. "It's beautiful. I learn something new here every day."

Playing at Prison View, *you* learn something new too. For instance, you learn what you should and shouldn't say to your golf ball. Like, when playing the 7th hole—which is separated from the hardest-core inmates, in Camp J, by only a razor-wire fence—you never want to holler, "Run! Run!" Or, "I *killed* that one!" Or, "Man, I got a shank today!" It's fine, though, to say after hooking one, "That's in jail," because it probably is.

The other thing is, seeing all the prisoners in white T-shirts and orange pants playing basketball behind barbed wire and a huge guard tower, you don't feel so bad about leaving number 7 with a double bogey. This is because at least you are *leaving*.

Not everybody in the town of Angola is thrilled about the Prison View nine. At the convenience store up the street, Connie Knapps Ross, whose brother, prison guard David Knapps, was taken hostage and murdered by inmates in 1999, can hardly talk about it.

"I don't think it's right," she said about the course, "because it's supposed to be a maximum security prison, and it's a playground."

But the brains behind it, Warden Burl Cain, says he built the course to *save* lives. With 600 correctional staffers and their families living on the grounds, he was looking for new ways to keep the guards around during their off-hours, in case the inmates get the urge to go sightseeing. He had hunting, fishing, swimming, softball and tennis on the prison's 18,000 acres, but nothing for golfers. The nearest course was 45 minutes away. So he persuaded the prison dentist, John Ory, a 15 handicapper, to design a course on an old bull pasture.

> It's weird to drive through prison gates to play golf. It's all you can do to keep from telling the guard, "We're here for nine to 18."

On the backs of the prisoners, they did it for about $80,000, which they raised selling concessions at Angola's famous prison rodeo. Ory says trying to build a course this good near New Orleans without inmate labor would have cost "about three million." Ory is part of a hot new trend in this country: prison dentists building golf courses.

No, that's a lie.

But the truth is, the course is a good thing for almost everybody. "If just one [inmate who is released] gets a job because of this program and doesn't commit a violent crime," Cain says, "it'll be worth every penny we spent."

You really oughta go play it. There are hilltop views of the prison below. There's an island green. And the tee markers are old handcuffs painted red or white.

People play the course once and come back again, thus raising the prison's recidivism rate.

Besides, who doesn't love to walk the green mile? □

If you have a comment for Rick Reilly, send it to **reilly@siletters.com**

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